



H. R. F. Keating

THE DOG IT WAS THAT DIED



B L O O M S B U R Y R E A D E R

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BLOOMSBURY READER

This dog and man at first were friends;
But when a pique began,
The dog, to gain some private ends,
Went mad and bit the man.

The wound it seem'd both sore and sad
To every Christian eye;
And while they swore the dog was mad,
They swore the man would die.

But soon a wonder came to light,
That show'd the rogues they lied,
The man recover'd of the bite,
The dog it was that died.

-Oliver Goldsmith

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Chapter One

'Look,' said the man who preferred to call himself Roger Farrar, 'let's call the whole thing off.'

'No, I want to see him.'

Eric Smith stating a preference. With quiet firmness.

Roger looked at him with a smile. Eric on one of his hobby-horses again. Eric astride a theory, knees clamped to its side, whip-arm going like a flail, reins loose as all hell.

'Okay,' Roger said, 'take your look at him if you must. But honestly the sensible thing would be to keep well clear. Suppose something went wrong. Suppose he recognized us. It's all forgotten now, totally forgotten. We don't want to start it up again.'

He spoke from a sense of faintly exasperated duty. He knew it would be no use.

Eric turned round to him and gripped him by the elbow. The expression of intense seriousness on the face beneath the cropped blond hair.

'No,' he said, 'the whole secret of dealing with an experience like that is to face it. This is a wonderful chance. We could square the whole thing up once and for all. Anything else is absolutely contraindicated.'

Roger grinned.

In spite of his underlying uneasiness.

'All right,' he said. 'I can see nothing will stop you. Where do we go? You're the one who knows his way around here. This is only the second time I've been in the place.'

He looked round him.

The college square in the dead depths between the end of the summer term and the beginning of the autumn one. Cobblestones slowly heating up under the undisturbed impact of the August sun. Two or three grey pigeons slowly making their way round in lazy circles. The whitish stone of the tall elaborate campanile clear cut against the deep blue of the sky. The cool green of the wide rectangles of lawn inside their unswinging barriers of looped chains. The harmonious balance of the great buildings all round, stating without assertion their right to be exactly where they were.

Alien.

Roger Farrar's face took on a faint look of withdrawal. This elaborate apparatus for living other people's lives.

'Up here then,' said Eric Smith.

Smith. The name that comes inevitably into your head when you have good reason for concealing the one on your birth certificate.

They went up the flight of shallow steps leading to the portico of the building Eric had called the Theatre.

'Through here,' he said.

He turned to his left inside the portico and pulled open a heavy little door almost lost in the shadows of the towering pillars. Roger followed him.

After the patchwork brightness of the sunlight the darkness at first seemed almost absolute. But gradually Roger was able to make out the familiar crest of Eric's short blond hair. He was beginning to climb a narrow flight of stairs. Obediently Roger followed, ducking his head to avoid the low ceiling at each turn.

Almost at once he was bathed in a light sweat, sticky and irritating. Ahead of him Eric climbed swiftly. From some window up above them the summer light poured in, quietened and diffused. Eric showed no signs of resenting the stairs. But then he played squash or something. All part

of those social activities which Roger had more than ever fought shy of since coming to Ireland.

At the top of the stairs they came out on to a narrow landing, dusty and neglected.

‘We go through here,’ said Eric. ‘We’re almost certain to have the whole gallery to ourselves: this affair isn’t going to attract a crowd.’

Roger went after him through a low archway – stooping with resentment – into the gallery.

Long narrow wooden benches were raked steeply downwards. The ornamental stucco ceiling of the big hall was too near their heads and looked out of proportion. The elaborate gilt chandelier swinging in the centre showed too much of its mechanics.

The scenery viewed from the wings.

In the gloom of the gallery itself there was a sharp smell of dust.

‘I still think,’ Roger said, ‘that the affair oughtn’t to have attracted us.’

Eric sat down on the rearmost bench, leaving a space for Roger beside him.

‘No one could see us in a million years,’ he said. ‘And it may be the last chance I’ll ever get of making any accurate diagnosis of the old bastard.’

Roger sat down gingerly in the place Eric had left for him. His knees came unpleasantly close to his chin. The bones of his shins were pressed disagreeably hard against the sharp edge of the back rail of the bench in front.

He decided to have a last try at doing something about Eric’s hobby-horse.

‘Look,’ he said, ‘what if your diagnosis is just the same as it was the last time we saw him, three years ago?’

‘But it won’t be,’ said Eric. ‘That’s the whole point. It can’t be. Over there he was the great Director. He ruled us. Look at the way we all called him the Bosun behind his back, a typical phobia.’

His hands beginning to flick out the gestures as they always did when he was excited.

‘No,’ he said, ‘this is where we’re going to get him into proportion.’

‘Well, I don’t want to get him into proportion: I want to get him into oblivion. The very thought of all that bloody bland stuff about the Institute of Human Relations, Leeds, makes me go hot under the collar.’

He was hot under the collar. The seam of his shirt had begun to chafe. Recently he had had increasing difficulty in doing up his collar button.

He stared gloomily down.

The big hall was still and deserted. Enormous full-length portraits of bygone worthies stared solemnly across at each other. One of them looked like Queen Elizabeth.

A beam of white sunlight came in at an angle through the arched windows at the far end and made a blinding patch of light on the dark wood of the panelling. On the platform under the windows a long row of chairs had been arranged stretching from side to side of the wide building. In the middle, advanced by about three feet, there was a small green baize-covered table with a carafe of water and a single tumbler on it. Down in the body of the hall four rows of chairs faced the platform. Evidently someone had decided officially that the attendance would not be large.

Eric seemed to be cheerfully at his ease. He was sitting back – as far as the narrow bench would allow – and looking round with an air of excited expectancy.

He nudged Roger.

‘That organ behind you was taken from a Spanish ship at the battle of Vigo Bay,’ he said. ‘I persuaded a chum of mine here to play it for me once. I had a theory that its age would mellow the tone.’

Roger was not in a mood to react very favourably.

‘The noise was excruciating,’ Eric said.

Roger made an effort and turned his head in the direction Eric had indicated. But he found that it required more effort than he was prepared to expend to see the organ. He turned back.

‘Isn’t it time they were here?’ he said.

Eric consulted his watch.

‘I grant you that it’s eleven exactly,’ he said. ‘But you’ve been over here long enough by now surely to know that time fetishism is extremely rare. They’ll appear in a minute or two. Don’t worry.’

Roger stood up.

‘I’m going,’ he said. ‘I’m going while there’s still a chance.’

Eric put a hand on his sleeve. Making no effort to conceal the look of bubbling excitement.

‘Surely,’ he said, ‘you’re not going to miss the presentation of the Sir Patrick Dun Medal?’

Deeply shocked and grieved.

Roger pulled his sleeve out of the light grasp.

‘Yes,’ he said, ‘I am.’

He turned and stumbled over the corner of the bench in trying to get out. He cursed.

‘But it’s to Professor William Bosenwite, Director of the Institute for Human Relations, Leeds, and sometime Lecturer in Psychology at Queen’s University, Belfast,’ Eric said.

Pained beyond belief.

Roger bent down towards him.

'I especially want to miss Professor William Bosenwite, otherwise known as the Bosun,' he said.

Eric looked wounded. Very wounded. Very, very wounded.

'But listen, half the point of the experiment is to have a reasonable number of subjects. A single one is altogether insufficient. Why, I might get carried away by the excitement of the occasion and totally forget to observe my reactions.'

Roger made a face at him.

The temperature dropping.

'All right,' he said. 'As usual, you win.'

He sat down again.

Eric spread his hands in a wide gesture of disclaimer.

'But you'll enjoy yourself,' he said. 'The ceremony is very interesting. Do you even know what it's all about?'

'No.'

'Very well then, I'll explain it. The Sir Patrick Dun Medal – awarded in memory of the great Irish physician, who is commemorated in the Sir Patrick Dun Hospital – is presented triennially to any worker in the field of psychological medicine whom the committee wish to honour, provided that the recipient be of Irish nationality or that their work has been conducted wholly or partly in Ireland. I quote from today's *Irish Times*.'

'And they picked on the Bosun for Pete's sake,' Roger said. 'If only they knew ...'

'Yes, well, of course, they don't know,' said Eric. 'And the only people who are in a position to tell them would be you and me, and we have agreed in our own interests to be totally aphasic, have we not?'

'I don't even know what aphasic means.'

'Really? You surprise me. I thought you were meant to be a words expert.'

'I'm an expert in knowing how words get changed. That doesn't mean I necessarily know what they all mean.'

'No? Well, aphasic means having lost speech because of a cerebral affection. Silence, dumbness, keeping mum, that's the prescription for us.'

'And forcing our way into this tinpot ceremony is your idea of that?' said Roger.

'My dear chap,' Eric said, 'you've allowed yourself to become far too much of a recluse. You know, you haven't a single real friend except that awful dog.'

'He's not an awful dog.'

'Well, we won't argue about that. Otherwise I might lose even the slender claim I have to be your only human friend. But where is the brute?'

'Cuchulain happens to be shut up in the flat, poor devil. You can't take a wolfhound everywhere.'

'I should say not. You know, you ought to abandon him more often and come to affairs like this. They are very definitely indicated in your case - as a step towards seeing more of the world. Extreme solitude makes people of your type highly morbid.'

Roger finally gave up.

He looked down again into the body of the hall. A single person had entered and taken a seat in the foremost of the four rows of chairs facing the platform.

'It would be nice, wouldn't it,' Eric said, 'if no one else turned up. Splendidly prophylactic against any feeling of pride our friend the Bosun might develop.'

The solitary member of the audience was a man of about sixty with a thatch of greyish hair brushed to the side in a single heavy sweep. He wore glasses. They looked as if they were horn-rimmed, though it was difficult to tell along the length of the big, bare hall. He was wearing a pair of flannel trousers, shapeless and baggy, and a dark blue jacket with a

white stripe in it, evidently once the top half of a formal suit. Each of the side pockets was bulged and distorted by a book.

Roger turned to Eric.

‘You know everybody in Dublin,’ he said. ‘Who is that chap?’

‘My dear fellow, don’t be so aggressive. Just because I didn’t cut myself off from all human society when we fled from the wicked shores of England, it doesn’t mean that I’m some sort of gossip writer or something. I don’t know everybody. I don’t have the least idea who the chappie is.’

A door at the side of the dais opened and a college porter in blue frock coat and black jockey cap entered. He went deferentially across to the table, moved the carafe an inch nearer the tumbler and went out again.

‘Things are beginning to warm up,’ Eric said.

He rubbed his hands eagerly together.

Roger shifted his knees round to the side.

‘It’s about time something happened,’ he said.

‘My good chap, you mustn’t be impatient. For one thing it makes you miss the finer points of the game. Have you considered that single tumbler, for instance? There’s going to be some nice skirmishing around that with any luck. If any one of the committee feel their status is higher than the Bosun’s – and after all as far as they’re concerned he’s only the head of some English institution which never seems to publish any results – they’ll make a grab for the tumbler and help themselves. The greater the academic eminence, you know, the greater the need to ingest a glass of stale –’

He broke off as the door on the dais opened again and a man in academic gown and cap poked his head round and looked carefully over the whole theatre. Roger leant farther back into the shadows.

‘That’s McKenna,’ said Eric, ‘Professor of Psychological Statistics at the College of Surgeons. He’s due to make the presentation.’

Professor McKenna withdrew his head. The faint sound of voices came to them. There was a note of querulousness.

Eric’s eyes gleamed.

‘There seems to have been a misunderstanding,’ he said.

Then suddenly Professor McKenna came in again, and this time he was escorting the Bosun.

Roger looked at the familiar figure, now encased in a gown of pitchy black. The enormous balloon head with the scanty pale gold hair and the deep pinky red complexion gave as ever the impression that blood was being pumped in at high pressure by an unrelenting machine. The body beneath looked like a series of linked balloons beneath the balloon of the head – a huge one for the trunk, a series of sausage-shaped ones for the arms and legs, even a cluster of bloated chipolatas for the fingers.

In spite of himself Roger leant forward to try and see if the top trouser button was open as it almost always had been at Leeds. Certainly the occasional visit of a junior Minister to the Institute had not been considered important enough to warrant sacrificing comfort to dignity. For the Prime Minister the concession had been made. Roger could not remember what had happened when senior Ministers called.

He turned to Eric to ask.

Eric’s face was totally white. His hands were gripping the bar of the bench in front of them with trembling force.

Chapter Two

Suddenly Professor McKenna's tight-lipped Ulster voice came to them loud and clear. By some trick of acoustics in the almost deserted theatre they might have been standing within a few feet of him rather than crouching in the shadows at the back of the gallery thirty or forty yards away.

'Take a pew, take a pew, Bosenwite. Our host appears unaccountably delayed, but that's no reason why we should be uncomfortable.'

Turning to the door they had just come through he called:

'Come along you others. We'll wait here for Meredith. We might as well have somewhere to sit.'

Eric Smith, as he called himself in Ireland, was still sitting staring at the huge bloated figure of Bosenwite. Roger decided to break the trance.

'Meredith?' he said sharply in Eric's ear, 'who's Meredith?'

Eric turned to him.

'Uh?' he whispered.

'I asked who Meredith is?'

'Meredith?'

'Yes, didn't you hear that fellow McKenna say they were going to wait for Meredith? Who is he?'

'Oh, I'm sorry, I didn't hear. I was miles away. Meredith. That'll be "Wendish" Meredith, who has the chair of Slavonic languages here at Trinity. He's called "Wendish" because he's the world authority on that particular sub-language. I suppose he's presiding today because he's a senior fellow. No doubt everybody else is away.'

Half a dozen other men in academic dress had come on to the platform. A desultory conversation was going on and it had become difficult to distinguish individual strands.

Eric still looked very pale, although he was not as statue-still as he had been when he had first seen the Bosun.

'I see our audience still numbers one,' Roger said.

Eric made no reply.

'You know,' Roger continued, 'I've a nasty feeling the Bosun knew perfectly well that this somewhat farcical element was likely to be predominant when he accepted this invitation. It's just the sort of thing that would appeal to his perverted sense of humour. You wouldn't find him going to some crowded, conventional honorary degree giving at Oxford or Cambridge, would you?'

Eric appeared to have heard, but seemed to have no comment to make.

'Well, well,' came Professor McKenna's raised voice from the platform, 'as we've come in we may as well all sit down, otherwise we might just as well have waited for Meredith outside.'

He walked to the middle of the neat row of chairs and began jerking one or two out of their places.

'Now,' he said, 'I suppose we'd better leave this one for Meredith - at least until we're sure he hasn't entirely forgotten the occasion - and you sit next to him here, Bosenwite. I shall sit on his other side, I think.'

The Bosun's chair held for him politely until he had carefully caused his enormous bulk to descend on it. McKenna turning to take his own place.

His whole frame abruptly taking on an utterly disapproving rigidity.

Someone else, a stocky man with fierce black hair, had sat himself down on the designated spot.

'Who's that with the mass of dark hair?' Roger asked.

‘O’Dwyer,’ answered Eric absently. ‘Dr Peadar O’Dwyer. He lectures in social psychology at National. Not bad either, considering how warily he has to tread in a Catholic country.’

Down on the dais Professor McKenna strode across and stood in front of Dr O’Dwyer. He glared down at him. O’Dwyer turned, found someone sitting a couple of chairs away and began a loud conversation with them on the subject of the weather.

‘They’re incompatible, O’Dwyer and McKenna,’ Eric said. ‘They seem to appear together on every Committee there is. I’ve a notion O’Dwyer gets himself on to them as fast as he finds out that McKenna has been appointed.’

He seemed to be a little more relaxed.

McKenna turned away from O’Dwyer and, still on his feet, began apologizing again to the Bosun for Professor Meredith’s lateness. The Bosun showed every sign of being delighted at the hitch.

‘Not at all, not at all,’ came the familiar high, piping voice rising above the murmur of general conversation.

Eric gripped the bar in front of him again.

The Bosun pushed a pudgy finger into McKenna’s waistcoat.

‘I expect he’s been detained by a leprechaun,’ he said. ‘I understand they are still abundant in this part of Ireland. Tell me, do you use them for experiments in extra-sensory perception? I bet you do, though you’re damned cagey about publishing your results. Still, you can trust me, you know. Tell me all.’

Evidently McKenna was by no means sure how to take this.

‘Certainly something seems to have detained your man Meredith,’ he answered in his give-nothing-away Ulster

voice. 'I think perhaps in the circumstances I'll venture to take the chair -'

He broke off abruptly. Dr O'Dwyer was rising to his feet with the evident intention of hopping smartly into the chairman's place. Professor McKenna snatched the academic cap from his head and tossed it neatly across on to the vacant chair.

'Yes,' he said grimly, 'I don't doubt that it's time we began.'

He crossed to the chairman's place and tapped once or twice on the table. A silence fell, broken only by Dr O'Dwyer beginning to tell his neighbour a complicated story about a piece of lobbying in the Dail in a voice nicely calculated to be loud enough to irritate the chairman but controlled enough to rank as a whisper.

'Gentlemen,' said McKenna very loudly, 'I have great pleasure in declaring this meeting open. We are -'

From beneath the gallery there was the sound of a pair of doors being flung open with a loud clap. A voice floated up.

'Ah, here we are, here we are. I wondered where you had all got to. You should have been in the Regent House, you know, but no matter, no matter.'

'Meredith,' whispered Eric to Roger.

A tall man with flowing grey hair and flowing tattered gown came striding rapidly up the length of the theatre. He was checked by the four rows of chairs just under the platform, looked wildly round for a moment, started off to go round them one way, stopped himself unaccountably, and went round the other. As he passed the single member of the audience sitting near the end of the front row he turned to him with a beaming smile. The man in the dark blue jacket and grey trousers half rose. Professor Meredith spread all five fingers of each hand in his face in astonishment,

shook his head rapidly from side to side, swung round, and mounted the few steps up on to the dais.

He went across and shook hands warmly with the Bosun.

‘You will think us Irish sadly disorganized, I fear,’ he said. ‘But we must try to make up in warmth what we have lacked in efficiency.’

He turned to the baize-covered table, pressed down on it with the tips of his extended fingers and appeared to turn his address to the body of the hall.

‘Yes,’ he said, ‘we must try in our Irish way to be hospitable even if we can never be – ahem – punctual.’

‘Hear, hear,’ said the man with the thatch of hair in the body of the theatre.

Professor Meredith gave him a long look.

‘I declare this meeting open,’ he said.

The member of the audience looked abashed.

‘I think I hardly need,’ Professor Meredith went on, ‘to introduce to any of you William Bosenwite, whose work first in our northern Athens of Belfast and latterly at Liverpool must be well known to us every one.’

‘Leeds,’ piped Bosenwite.

‘I think we can say without fear of contradiction,’ Professor Meredith continued blandly, ‘that it is due almost solely to his efforts at the Institute for Human Relations that Liverpool has been put, as it were, firmly on the academic map.’

‘Leeds, Leeds,’ Bosenwite piped.

But it was plain from the look of sharp delight on the pink balloon face that he was feeling no resentment.

‘But it is not for me to keep you all here with these few words of introduction,’ Meredith resumed.

He looked once more at the solitary member of the audience.

‘It is simply for me,’ he said, ‘to put before you, as it were, first our distinguished visitor from Liverpool –’

He swung round to Bosenwite just as he was opening the little slit of a mouth in his full-to-bursting face. The slit closed.

‘– or as I might well call him,’ Meredith said flinging his tattered gown wide, ‘our erstwhile colleague from that sister centre of learning in the six counties of this island.’

He swung round in a full circle and faced Professor McKenna.

‘And secondly,’ he said in a concluding gabble, ‘Professor McKenna who is presenting the Sir Patrick Dun Medal on this auspicious occasion.’

Professor McKenna rose gauntly to his feet.

The member of the audience clapped politely.

‘One of the great difficulties that face our committee in making this triennial award,’ Professor McKenna began, measuring out thriftily his terse Ulster vowels, ‘is the provision that the recipient be an Irishman, or that their work has been done wholly or partly in Ireland. We have attempted to have the deed of trust altered. But this, it seems, would require legislation by at least three parliaments, and our legislators being what they are ...’

A long pause. Evidently a joke had been made. After a while the member of the audience managed to produce a clucking sound which might have been taken for appreciative, reminiscential laughter. Professor McKenna resumed.

‘In short, we find with the years increasing difficulty in making the award at all. And there is not even any provision for leaving it in abeyance.’

The sharpness of the committee’s predicament had brought an unaccustomed tinge of emotion into the harshness of the Ulster tones.

Roger looked over to the Bosun. His slit mouth in the big balloon face was curled in a delighted smile at this example of an Irish compliment.

‘It is thus,’ McKenna continued, ‘that we have the greatest pleasure in singling out for the award this year Professor William Bosenwite, Director of the Institute for Human Relations, Leeds. Of his work there I am not competent to speak. No doubt the administrative problems of the directorship have precluded the publication of much written material.’

Roger nudged Eric. Eric, sitting tensely examining the blimp-like form of the Bosun, appeared not to notice.

‘I have however,’ McKenna continued, ‘some knowledge of what is undertaken at the Institute -’

Eric must obviously have been listening to what McKenna had been saying because at this he turned to Roger with a look of total amazement.

‘Surely he’s not going to turn out to know?’ he said.

He had forgotten in his excitement to whisper. Roger drew quickly back into the shadows. If conversations on the dais could be clearly heard in the gallery ...

But apparently the acoustic phenomenon worked only in one direction. Down on the platform the Bosun was looking at Professor McKenna with a glance of mild inquiry, Professor Meredith had captured the carafe and was pouring some water into the tumbler with intense deliberation. The other members of the committee were making a respectable show of listening to McKenna. Dr O’Dwyer was sitting with his face in his hands and his greenish black gown falling forward on either side of him, giving the effect of an abandoned heap of mourning garments.

‘I have had the pleasure of spending some considerable periods,’ McKenna went parsimoniously on, ‘at the

Institute's parent university of Leeds, and while there I have enjoyed the occasional hospitality of Professor Bosenwite.'

'He makes it sound very occasional,' Roger whispered to Eric.

This time Eric looked round at him. He smiled bleakly at the joke.

'And although,' McKenna continued down on the dais, 'our conversation never happened to turn to academic matters, I formed the distinct impression that the Institute for Human Relations was under the guidance, and I may say tutelage, of a very remarkable person.'

The Bosun deflected his glance of mild inquiry. A crisis had passed.

'Of his work in Belfast, which happily makes him eligible for this award,' McKenna resumed after a disappointed glance at the tumbler of water which Professor Meredith was now sipping appreciatively, 'it is easier to speak. Bosenwite was, as you all know, a lecturer at Queen's University for -'

He faltered.

'- for a period a few years ago. It was a period of fruitful endeavour, of that I am certain. It was in some sense a period of sterling achievement. It was a time which we in Ireland have much to be grateful for. It made its mark - small perhaps but none the less significant - in the annals of medical history in this island. Unfortunately, as no doubt you all know, Bosenwite was called away to his present responsibilities earlier than we could have wished, but those three months -'

He stopped in full flow. The enormity of his admission appeared to strike him with paralysing force. Then academic integrity asserted itself.

'Those three months - though they may seem to some an unduly short period - were nevertheless of abiding significance and it is fit that we honour them today. And so I

have great pleasure in presenting this medal to William Bosenwite, formerly of Queen's University, Belfast, now of the Institute for Human Relations, Leeds.'

Professor McKenna drew a small black box from his jacket pocket and took from it a little silver medal dangling at the end of a loop of broad plangent green ribbon. He advanced on the Bosun who stood to meet him.

Suddenly the black hump which concealed the form of Dr O'Dwyer was convulsed by a seismic ripple.

'One moment, Mr Chairman,' O'Dwyer said loudly.

McKenna hesitated.

O'Dwyer now fully on his feet gave him a smile of angelic charm.

'I think it must have been forgotten,' he said, 'that Professor McKenna's excellent speech has to be seconded. In the absence of any other arrangement I am very glad to take that responsibility upon myself.'

Professor Meredith waved at him vaguely.

'By all means, my dear fellow, by all means,' he said.

He drew a gold hunter from his waistcoat pocket, unclipped it from its chain, and placed it in front of him on the green baize table. With ceremony.

'I have very great pleasure in seconding the proposal to grant to Professor Bosenwite the Sir Patrick Dun Medal,' O'Dwyer began.

He turned for a moment to look not at the Bosun but at McKenna.

'Of his work at present, as my good friend Professor McKenna has said, we know nothing,' he continued with unmistakable relish. 'But of his work in his brief period at Belfast I feel I am competent to speak. It is not many of us in this island who have made any studies of the human mind at the point of breakdown under artificially induced stress, but that - as of course Professor McKenna knows

very well – was the subject on which Bosenwite had begun a certain amount of research before the attractions of the other side of the Irish Sea proved too great for him.'

'I didn't know he actually worked on that at a university,' Roger whispered to Eric.

'What else?' Eric replied.

Bitterly.

'Curiously enough,' O'Dwyer went on, 'I have myself undertaken a not inconsiderable amount of research, unofficially as it were, into much the same field. And I think I can say it is a field of such novelty and complication that only those who have worked in it are in a position to assess the work of others on the same subject.'

He changed his stance to face McKenna squarely.

'It is for that reason,' he said, 'that I am inclined to regret the fact that I did not have the happiness to join the committee until after this award had been decided. I might have been able to make my colleagues a little clearer on the exact extent of Bosenwite's achievement at Belfast. But, as I say, I have the greatest pleasure now in seconding the presentation of the award.'

'Well,' whispered Roger, 'he did at least leave the worth of the Bosun's work utterly ambiguous.'

Eric's eyes were fixed on the Bosun.

The solitary member of the audience leant forward anxiously and clapped.

Professor Meredith rose.

'It only remains then,' he said, 'for me to thank you all for your attendance.'

He allowed his glance to wander over the wide and bare expanse of the hall.

'I like to think,' he added, 'of all the various ceremonies these mute walls have witnessed – today's not least among

them – and of how after each one of them the theatre is left deserted, calm and silent once again. A delightful calm, if I may borrow the words of that great and neglected poet, Jeremiah Joseph Callinan, our Irish Byron.'

'Oh, no,' Eric groaned.

'What's that?' Roger asked.

'Callinan, Jeremiah Joseph, Meredith's symptom of monomania. I didn't see how he could manifest it on this occasion.'

But Professor Meredith was quoting. His right hand extended, its long fingers beating strict time.

'Tis a delightful calm. There is no sound
Save the low murmur of the distant rill.
A voice from heaven is breathing all around
Bidding the earth and restless man be still.'

Roger turned to Eric.

'I like the distant rill touch,' he said. 'I suppose it refers to the traffic in Nassau Street.'

But Eric seemed not to have heard. Again he was staring with fixed intensity at the bloated form of the Bosun.

'Look, Eric,' Roger said, 'don't get wound up about the Bosun. You were right: this has been amusing. I'm glad I locked Cuchulain up in his kennel and came. But don't you start taking it all seriously.'

Eric did not answer.

Down on the dais Professor Meredith had got into full swing on the Irish Byron. The critics who had unaccountably failed to accord him his correct niche in the Irish pantheon were getting a pretty severe working over. Already the English Byron had been sharply demoted in the international status tables. Roger began to look round at the low archway leading to the stairs down to the square.

But Eric was not going to be easy to get away. Roger decided he might as well wait.

At last Professor Meredith gracefully and tactfully brought the subject round to the Sir Patrick Dun Medal. He thanked them all for coming once again, and with a wide spreading gesture of lay benediction dismissed them.

The dignitaries on the platform began to file out. The member of the audience daringly went up the steps on to the dais. He sought out the Bosun and seemed to be introducing himself.

‘One moment,’ Dr O’Dwyer called out suddenly.

The informal procession stopped half way between the chairs and the door.

‘We seem to have forgotten to hand the medal to Bosenwite,’ O’Dwyer said.

Sure enough the little black box was lying on the table beside the almost empty carafe. A short length of its green ribbon protruded, clashing horribly with the baize.

Professor McKenna darted a glance of pure hatred at O’Dwyer and seized the little box. He walked across towards the Bosun holding it out for him to take.

When he was about a yard away Professor Meredith’s long-fingered hand swooped. It neatly abstracted the medal from the box.

Swiftly Meredith spread the hideous green ribbon into a broad loop. The Bosun backed a pace. Meredith advanced, the loop held wide.

The Bosun glanced to the side and in an instant Meredith had pounced. The little silver medal dangled on the Bosun’s enormous puffy chest. The virulent ribbon encircled his neck in a broad band of green.

Then the Bosun grinned.

‘You know,’ he said in his high piping voice, ‘I was beginning to think I was going to miss the chance of making

the impromptu speech I prepared in the aeroplane coming over. That would have been a pity. I too was going to quote some lines of Jeremiah Joseph Callinan's. I was going to apologize for leaving Ireland by quoting her greatest poet. Ireland, I was going to say,

Thy name to this bosom
Now sounds like a knell;
My fond one, my dear one,
For ever farewell.'

Eric turned swiftly to Roger.

'He would do it,' he said furiously. 'He would manage to beat even that obscure old fool Meredith at his chosen game.'

'Yes,' Roger said, 'he's pretty impressive, I must admit. How could he have found out that the man who was due to introduce him had a mania for some forgotten poet?'

'If you're paranoid,' Eric answered, 'you're willing to go to any lengths to assert your authority. Listen to him now: airing himself on tetrachoric correlation. You know that McKenna's worked on that for years. This is all intended to prove he's hopelessly out of date.'

'Good for the Bosun,' Roger said.

'No,' said Eric. 'Don't you see? It all shows how wrong it is that he should be in charge of anything, let alone of the Institute at Leeds.'

'Well, that's no longer our affair, thank goodness,' Roger said.

Eric did not answer.

'Of course,' the Bosun declaimed, turning to the other members of the committee, 'if you're really stuck for people to make awards to, the remedy is simple: declare whatever you like as being in the field of psychological medicine. After all, you never can tell with the human brain: anything may

be relevant. That's what makes it so fascinating to me. You never quite know what stimulus will produce what result.'

'No, you don't do you, Bosun?'

Eric Smith was standing up beside Roger bellowing for all he was worth at the immense fat figure in the dense black gown away on the dais at the other end of the hall.

Roger made a grab but Eric slipped from his grasp and went leaping downwards towards the edge of the gallery. He leant over the rail and shouted again.

'You never expected the stimulus of your antics today would produce a death blow for the Institute for Human Relations, did you?' he yelled.

Roger walked quickly down towards Eric. He made no attempt to quieten his steps. Eric was much too absorbed with his hysterical hatred of the balloon man on the platform to notice any noise behind him.

Roger hit him sharply on the back of the neck. The blow put him out like a snuffed candle.

Chapter Three

When nothing had happened after Eric Smith's outburst at the presentation of the Sir Patrick Dun Medal he and Roger Farrar began to tell each other that no harm had been done. They came to believe it.

It was no use them pretending to each other that the Bosun had not realized that it was Eric who had shouted at him. He had come down from the dais into the theatre and had attempted to get up to the gallery. Luckily the small door leading to it was not easy to find and Roger had succeeded in lugging the inert form of Eric down the stairs while the Bosun was still in the body of the hall looking for a way up and fending off the solicitude of Professor Meredith.

The fresh air of the square had revived Eric and Roger had managed to propel him through the front gate of Trinity and out into College Green. By a stroke of luck a taxi had been putting down a fare just outside the college railings. Roger under the benign gaze of the statues of Goldsmith and Burke had bundled Eric into it.

They had driven away just as the balloon-like figure of the Bosun had hurried through the gate. But there was no doubt that he had seen them both, and that he would have recognized them.

At first Eric had taken it very badly. It was a whole week before Roger could get him to leave his flat at the top of a tall house in Baggot Street at all.

'What can the Bosun do?' he said yet again.

'We hold commissions in the British Army, don't we?' said Eric. 'We're technically deserters, aren't we?'

‘Look, you’re just torturing yourself. You’re really simply harping on anything you can find to make yourself feel more miserable. You must have flourished your status as a deserter in my face half a dozen times today already.’

‘Well, it’s true. I am a deserter. If I was caught I’d be liable to a hell of a term in prison, or worse.’

‘Not worse. Not in peacetime. And in any case there are dozens of real deserters from the British Army in Ireland. We’re not going to be arrested and sent back. For God’s sake, that’s the principle we’ve been living on for the last three years.’

‘But that was before the Bosun knew we were here. That was when changing our names and growing a moustache and using hair dye was enough. But the Bosun knows us too well. He knows we’re here now. He’ll get us back.’

‘Now look, stop it. Just sit down there and ask yourself how he’s going to get us back.’

Eric did sit down. On the edge of the big broad battered armchair by the window from which the great gangling brownish Cuchulain was peering out despairingly.

‘The Bosun’s not going to start proceedings,’ Roger said. ‘He daren’t. He doesn’t want the whole purpose of the Institute for Human Relations produced in court. He may want to touch us, but he can’t.’

Eric sat gloomily looking at the toes of his worn black shoes.

After a while he groaned.

‘Why did I have to go to see him in the first place?’ he said.

‘It was quite a reasonable thing to do,’ Roger answered. ‘The Bosun was, quite by chance, actually going to be in Dublin. It was pretty sound psychology to go and look at him from a safe distance and so to speak exorcise him.’

Eric laughed. Sourly.

‘The psychologist’s psychology,’ he said. ‘I must say it worked like a charm, didn’t it?’

‘It did as a matter of fact,’ Roger said. ‘Only it worked for me and not for you. If I hadn’t actually seen the Bosun down on that platform I wouldn’t have been able to cope with this, I can tell you.’

Eric continued to look at the toes of his shoes. But with closer application..

‘I need boot polish,’ he said at last.

‘Okay,’ said Roger, ‘we’ll trot round to the shop on the corner and get some.’

Eric gave him a sneering smile.

‘Quite the little doctor, aren’t we?’ he said. ‘You’ll be getting me to do raffia work next.’

But he jumped quickly out of the broad sagging armchair and went to the door. Roger grabbed Cuchulain’s heavy leather leash, slipped it on to his collar and followed down the long flight of stairs.

A salt-laden north-east wind was blowing off the Irish Sea and although the sun was shining it was distinctly chilly. Roger and Eric stepped out briskly to the poky general store just round the corner off Baggot Street where Eric conducted his limited housekeeping. Cuchulain foraged ahead of them tugging at his leash and rising up every now and again on his haunches to snuffle at the wind.

They turned the corner and there standing outside the little dilapidated shop was a Civic Guard sunning himself like a great purring tomcat.

Eric stopped in his tracks so sharply that the Guard looked across at him. In an instant Eric had turned on his heel and started to run.

Roger managed to check his impulse to hare after him. He tugged Cuchulain across the narrow side street and went over towards the Guard, who was moving his shoulders

uneasily, at a loss whether to investigate Eric's suspicious action or not.

'I hope you're always about when my friend forgets he's left the bath tap running,' Roger said to the Guard.

'How's that?' said the Guard.

The proper reaction to friendly chatter from a respectable dog-owner was visibly fighting with the lingering suspicions Eric's flight had aroused.

'He did it once before and the people below had to call the Guards to break in and stop the flooding,' Roger said. 'So you acted as a pretty potent reminder.'

'Is that so now?'

'It certainly is. But I must be getting back. I dare say there's mopping up to be done.'

Roger dived into the little shop, praying that this time Cuchulain's tail would not cause any havoc. He spotted a tin of polish on the counter, picked it up, found the right money in his pocket, and was out of the shop again in half a minute.

The Guard was grinning broadly. Roger hurriedly lugged Cuchulain back to the flat.

Eric was there. Roger had to persuade him to open the front door but it took him less time than it might have done.

The incident did not turn out to be as much of a setback as Roger had feared. The very next day Eric went out and walked the streets. The day after he began work again.

What had first attracted Roger and Eric to Ireland was the existence of the Dublin School of Further Studies, an organization founded in the thirties to provide for learned refugees from Germany who wanted to work in a neutral country. It had created chairs and lectureships in whatever particular department of learning they were needed. Since its start it had never lacked applicants for employment. Roger and Eric were the first to come from Britain.

Roger had to escort Eric to the school on the day he elected to go back. But once Eric had got into his own little psychology laboratory, in what had once been a scullery in one of the block of houses overlooking a square which had been taken over by the School, he relaxed.

After a while Roger left him eagerly inspecting his cages of rats to see what progress had been made in his absence. Roger went back to the library where he carried out his own research - into Anglo-Irish speech forms.

His quickening steps as he neared the library door. Sanctuary.

His books were spread out on his table as he had left them the last time he had used them. His notebook, the current early nineteenth century novel open at the chapter he had just finished, the pile of similar works waiting to be read.

The unreadable books he had raced through like a schoolboy reading *The Three Musketeers*. The never extinguished hope of finding the very speech form he needed to confirm a hypothesis or illustrate an argument.

It was two weeks later while he was again in the library sitting alone in front of another novel that someone opened the door and came in with such exaggerated care that it disturbed even his immersed trance.

He looked up.

There stood the solitary member of the audience at the presentation of the Sir Patrick Dun Medal. He was unmistakable. The same shiny blue jacket, the same baggy grey trousers, the same sweep of grey hair above a pair of roundlens horn rim spectacles.

He put his finger to his lips, smiled and nodded to Roger conspiratorially. He pointed to a table near Roger's and

indicated with some heavy pantomime that he was going to work there.

Roger buried his head in his novel again. He noted that he was not upset by this reminder of the Bosun.

After a short interval the man at the next table suddenly said in a breathy whisper:

'By the way, may I introduce myself? My name is Wyndham. George Wyndham, as a matter of fact.'

'Oh yes,' said Roger.

As there was no one else in the library, he did not lower his voice.

George Wyndham evidently took this as an invitation to talk.

He talked. At length. He poured out information. He was English. He had come over to Ireland 'for the civilization'. He could not think why he had not done so years before. England was horrible now, entirely materialistic. It would have been impossible to have got permission to use a library like this in England.

Roger envisaged the buzzing persistence which had done the trick in Ireland.

Wyndham's voice was slightly louder than necessary and his gaze was intense and unwavering. As he spoke his Adam's apple bobbed up and down. Roger watched it.

He tried to get away several times. Without success. Eventually he jumped up, shook Wyndham's hand hard and said loudly:

'We must meet again some time.'

He gave him no time to reply, but dodged rapidly out of the room. As soon as he had got the door closed behind him he turned and ran down the stairs leading to Eric's laboratory.

Eric was alone, carefully mixing a drug into bowls of food for his caged rats.

‘Eric,’ Roger said, ‘there’s something I think I ought to warn you about.’

Eric looked up.

‘You remember the man who sat in the body of the hall at the presentation, the chap with the blue jacket and grey trousers?’

Eric stopped pouring the colourless fluid into the mess of grey porridge.

‘He’s just wandered in here,’ Roger said. ‘I thought it might be a shock for you if you happened to bump into him. Apparently he’s an Englishman who’s recently come over. He’s the most godawful bore –’

‘Why to warn me?’ Eric said. The edgy tone.

Roger looked at him. With concern.

‘I came to warn you because I knew that you were capable of barking at me like that,’ he said.

‘I didn’t bark.’

‘You did, you know. You bark every time anything reminds you of –’

‘Well, your friend had better not go reminding me, had he?’

‘He’s no friend of mine,’ Roger said.

The attempt to infuse the remark with lightness was only partially successful.

Eric turned back to his rats’ bowls.

‘Now I’ve bloody well forgotten where I’d got to,’ he said.

He strode across to the sink and tipped the test tube of colourless fluid into it.

‘Listen,’ Roger said, ‘this chap Wyndham won’t know who you really are. That’s what you’ve got to remember. Nobody but the Bosun knows that.’

Eric turned away and started taking various bottles from a cupboard. He took a fresh test tube, fixed it in a clamp and began sucking up fluid from one of the bottles into a pipette.

Roger watched him for a little.

There seemed to be nothing more he could say.

He turned and left the little laboratory. As he shut the door he heard the tinkle of breaking glass as Eric hurled something into the deep clinical sink.

Without thinking where he was going he went back to the sanctuary of the library.

George Wyndham was still there, standing by his table and looking down at his work.

'I took the liberty of glancing at it while you were away,' he said to Roger.

His Adam's apple bobbed up and down propitiatorily.

Roger sat down without a word.

'The Banim brothers I see you're reading,' Wyndham said. 'Very interesting. John Banim, wasn't it, that they called the Scott of Ireland? I went to a very interesting course of lectures on the influence of Scott once. I thought the name Banim was familiar. Are you working in that field? I must see if I can find my notes of those lectures. There might be something there that would be helpful to you.'

'That's very kind of you,' Roger said. 'But my interest in the O'Hara family is not strictly literary. I'm a philologist.'

'A philologist,' said Wyndham with delight. 'Then you're a man after my own heart. I'm a member of the South London Philological Society, actually. They get some very good people at their weekly meetings. Of course, I haven't been to many recently: I belong to so many societies, you know. I suppose I ought to resign now I've come to live over here. But you can never tell when membership of any particular body may come in useful.'

'I suppose not.'

Roger turned to his notebook and began making an entry. Wyndham was not discouraged.

'So your interest in the Banim brothers is philological, is it?' he went on. 'I suppose you're working on the difference between English as spoken in Ireland and the native use?'

Roger kept his head down.

'Interesting, of course, very. As a matter of fact I thought of making a bit of a study of that myself. Did you know that in Ireland the word "rear" is spelt r-e-r-e? But I wouldn't have thought that someone who's worked at Leeds would find a historical subject all that interesting. Perhaps I could take over from you? Leave you free for something else?'

This time Roger did look up.

'Did you say take over from me?' he asked.

Doing nothing to keep the indignation out of his voice.

'I was saying that, as I'm particularly interested in the Irish use of English, perhaps I could be of help. I could see what work you've done and carry on from there, and you would be free to tackle anything else that happened to interest you.'

'That's a very friendly suggestion,' Roger said. 'Shall I tell you what subject interests me more than anything else at the moment?'

'Ah, I thought so.'

George Wyndham rubbed his bony hands together.

'The Irish use of the English language.'

'Oh.'

Behind the utilitarian hornrims the pale eyes blinked. Once.

'Well, then, perhaps we could collaborate. I've nothing particular on at the present time. I'd be quite willing to drop everything and muck in with you.'

Roger closed the novel by the Banim brothers. He snapped his notebook to beside it. He picked them both up. He walked out.

After that he took care to see as little as possible of George Wyndham. He saw little of anybody. Occasionally as autumn turned to winter he realized with a slight shock that there were newcomers to the staff at the School whom he did not even know by name. But he liked his solitary existence with the bounding Cuchulain as his only companion.

He saw less of Eric now that his reassurances seemed to be no longer needed. From time to time he bumped into him at the School but their paths seldom crossed.

It was only because of Eric's insistence that loneliness would 'lead almost directly to hypochondriasis' that he agreed to go to supper with him one Sunday just after Christmas.

It was a very cold evening with a smell of snow in the air. Roger walked towards Eric's flat pulled along at the end of Cuchulain's heavy leash with his head down fighting against a cutting wind. He hurried up the steps of the tall house and pushed open the unlocked front door. To be out of the wind was a positive sensation, like silence after the sudden ending of some continuous noise.

Roger stopped where he was until he was breathing a little more easily. Then he released Cuchulain's leash and set off up the long flights of sharply mounting stairs with the big dog scampering awkwardly up in front of him. He felt his legs growing more and more leaden. The relief of being out of the wind had ceased to have its warming effect and the dimly lit stairs were mustily chill.

At the top the light had failed. From the landing below Roger clicked the switch once or twice hopefully but nothing

happened. Clasping the banister rail firmly he heaved himself upwards into the black darkness. At the top he paused to get his breath back. Cuchulain came and stood by his side. In the darkness he could hear him panting too. He put down his hand and tickled the top of his head.

For a moment he could not remember the lay-out of the landing. But at last his eyes got used to the lack of light and he was able to make out the squares of the panes in a small window. He remembered it from previous visits, perpetually jammed shut and thick with matted dust.

The memory brought back the rest of the geography of the landing to him. He felt his way expertly to the flat door and knocked on it hard.

The door gave half an inch.

Cuchulain nosed his way in and Roger followed.

'It's me,' he shouted, 'and my dog. Don't come out. You left the latch off.'

The little hallway of the flat was also in darkness. Roger fumbled for the switch and put the light on. He closed the front door and released the snib on the lock. The catch clicked back into place.

Eric still had not replied. It was possible that he had slipped round the corner to buy some stout. Roger went forward into the sitting-room. Again no light. He stood on the threshold and felt at the wall for the switch. He found it in a moment and snapped it on.

Eric had not gone out for some stout. Eric was dead.

Chapter Four

Not dead drunk, but dead.

There could be no doubt about it.

Although Eric was sprawled in the big broad armchair, which in the winter he kept nearer the fire than the window, and although there was an opened bottle of stout on the low table at his side and a glass lying at his feet, there was no possibility of mistaking death for a drunken stupor. There was a rigidity about the limbs which put anything else out of the question.

Cuchulain knew it at once. He sat down on his haunches, lifted up his scraggy neck and softly keened.

Roger stood in silence beside him looking fixedly at the body of the man he had known for the past three years as Eric Smith.

At last he put his hand for an instant on Cuchulain's shaggy head and then cautiously stepped nearer the body and examined it. The left hand was protruding beyond the armchair with the hand concealed. Protruding, not dangling. Eric's body was not relaxed.

Leaning right over, Roger was able to see that Eric's concealed hand was clutching a small white pasteboard card. For a moment Roger pondered. Then he crossed over to Eric's desk and looked in the small oval brass tray on the top of it.

Cuchulain stopped his keening and turned his head to watch him. Perplexedly.

In the tray were two ball-point pens, a dirty stub of india-rubber, a pencil without a point, half a dozen paperclips, a single black shoelace, and a pair of scissors.

Roger took the scissors and returned to the big sagging armchair. He leant over it again and very carefully, using the blades of the scissors as tongs, he tweaked the card out of his dead friend's hand.

He straightened himself up and rubbed the small of his back.

Still holding the card between the blades of the scissors he turned it over so that he could read what was on the front.

The colour in his face, which the effort of retrieving the card had brought heavily up, was drained away.

Sucked back.

The card was printed like an ordinary visiting card. First the name:

J. Parkinson Crowle

And under it in slightly smaller type in the same rather ornate jobbing printer's face three words:

The Southampton Rapist

And in much smaller type in a different face in the bottom right-hand corner two more words:

By Appointment

Roger put the scissors and the card down on the low table beside the broad-bottomed armchair. He clenched his fists.

For nearly ten minutes he stood without moving, looking down at Eric's body lying rigidly in the big armchair and at the low table beside it, on which there were three objects - an empty bottle of stout, a pair of scissors and a white visiting card with three lines of black type on it.

Then he stooped quickly and picked up the card. He took no precautions now to avoid touching it. He simply held it up, looked at it one last time and carefully put it in his wallet. Then he restored the scissors to the oval brass tray on the desk. The telephone was on the other side of the desk. He picked up the receiver and asked for the nearest Guards barracks.

Within ten minutes there came a heavy knock at the front door. Cuchulain started into life and stood bristling and growling.

Roger went out into the little hall. He opened the front door and found himself face to face with the same tall Guard he and Eric had seen outside the little grocer's shop round the corner.

'Did you ring the barracks?' the man asked.

'I did.'

'Inspector Murphy will be round directly. In the meantime you're not to touch anything.'

'That's all right,' Roger answered. 'I thought that would be the right thing to do. I haven't touched a thing.'

He opened the sitting-room door, went hurriedly across to the bristling Cuchulain and put a hand through his collar. The Guard came into the room. Roger could feel Cuchulain's muscles tauten against the dark leather of the collar. The Guard went across to Eric's body and felt the still wrist.

'You were after coming in here and you saw him like this, was that it?' he asked.

'Yes,' said Roger.

He hesitated.

'That is -'

The Guard looked at him sharply. Keen eyes in the big red weather-beaten face.

‘That is I saw the body as soon as I came in, but I didn’t ring the barracks straight away.’

‘Why would that be?’ the Guard asked.

Before Roger could reply he added:

‘You’re English, aren’t you?’

‘Yes. Yes, I am. I live over here though. I came over about three years ago.’

‘Well,’ the Guard said, ‘I mustn’t be asking you questions when the inspector’s coming round himself. But you tell him why you didn’t get on to the barracks right away, mind.’

‘Yes. I will, certainly.’

They waited in awkward silence, standing just by the door of the sitting-room. After a while Roger took his hand out of Cuchulain’s collar. The Guard clicked his tongue at him. The big dog sniffed at the Guard’s massive boot but was too uneasy to be friendly.

At last they heard steps on the stairs. The Guard hurried forward and let in Inspector Murphy with a police surgeon and two detectives in plain clothes. The inspector formed a curious contrast to the hulking figure of the red-faced Guard. He was a small man, probably as small as the regulations permitted, and his face had an unhealthy office paleness. He left the examination of the body to the doctor and asked Roger to tell him exactly what had happened.

‘I was coming to supper,’ Roger said. ‘The door was open. I let myself in with the dog. The room was in darkness. I switched on the light. I saw Eric. I made sure he was dead and then I telephoned you. Or, to be accurate, I telephoned you after several minutes. I wanted to think.’

The inspector looked at him sharply with his pale ferret’s face.

‘What about?’ he asked.

‘About Eric. About why he should be dead.’

‘Very natural, God rest him. And did you come to any conclusions?’

‘No,’ Roger said. ‘He looked as if he had been poisoned or something, but I suppose it could have been a heart attack. Though he never told me he suffered from anything. He always seemed very fit. He played squash and tennis and whatnot.’

The inspector turned abruptly and crossed the room to the big armchair where the doctor was still examining the body. He leant over beside him and said something in a voice too low for Roger to hear.

‘Oh yes, definitely. No doubt about that at all,’ the doctor said.

The inspector straightened up and came back to Roger.

‘Death by some form of poison,’ he said. ‘Now, you say you knew the deceased fairly well?’

‘Yes, we were friends. We came over from England together to work at the School of Further Studies.’

The inspector looked at him sharply.

‘Did you now?’ he said.

‘About three years ago.’

‘I see. So you’d very likely know if the deceased had expressed any intention of taking his own life, or had troubles or anything of that nature?’

‘I might. But I didn’t see as much of him as you might think. His interests were rather different from mine.’

‘All the same, did he say anything about suicide ever?’

Roger took his time over his answer.

‘No,’ he said, ‘though I had thought recently that he had been a bit worried. I don’t know what about.’

Again the sharp ferret’s look.

‘No idea?’

‘No.’

‘And nothing actually said about suicide?’

‘No. Not even anything like a broad hint.’

‘I see. Now I take it the deceased wasn’t married. There’s no sign of a matrimonial home at all.’

‘No, he wasn’t married.’

‘Was he a wealthy man at all?’

Roger looked round the flat. The slightly dilapidated furniture that went with it, the decorations overdue for renewal.

‘There’s some live in worse places than this that have money enough in the bank,’ Inspector Murphy said.

‘Yes, yes, I suppose so. But I’m sure Eric didn’t have any income except what he earned at the School.’

‘And that isn’t all that much, eh? It isn’t there that you’ll be making your fortune for all that it’s so well spoken of.’

Roger smiled a little. ‘No.’ he said.

‘I see. Now, did you handle or touch anything at all while you were waiting for Guard O’Casey to get round here?’

‘No, I didn’t. Though of course I’ve handled things in the flat on previous visits.’

Guard O’Casey, standing outside the open front door, said in a loud voice:

‘I made certain he didn’t, inspector, so far as I was able.’

‘Good.’

The inspector looked down at his shoes. They were highly polished and the toes were unexpectedly pointed for a policeman’s.

‘There wasn’t anything at all in the form of a note?’ he asked.

‘No,’ said Roger without hesitation, ‘I’d have told you if there had been. You asked me if I touched anything.’

‘I know, I know,’ said Inspector Murphy soothingly. ‘It’s just that it’s pretty usual for a suicide to leave a note. They

almost all do it. But if there wasn't one, there wasn't one. Sure, it may turn up somewhere yet. Now, if you'll give Sergeant Boyle there your address I think you needn't wait any longer, Mr Farrar. Good night to you.'

Roger gave Sergeant Boyle, one of the plainclothes men, his address and left.

Cuchulain trotting down the chill stairs in front of him, his tail between his legs.

Late in the afternoon of the next day Inspector Murphy called on Roger at the School. There was nobody else working in the library and Roger said that they might as well sit there in comfort.

'They don't give you much in the way of accommodation, I dare say,' the inspector said.

'It's sparse but adequate,' Roger replied. 'The trouble is we need central heating. We've a good fire here, but anywhere else is apt to be perishing.'

'I see you have that fuel they make from the turf. I often wonder is it any good at all.'

'Oh, we're comfortable here all right. Now, what can I do for you?'

'Well,' said Inspector Murphy, 'it looks like your Mr Smith committed suicide all right. He had poison in his stout. Bitter stuff enough, but I dare say you could take it in stout and not be after noticing it too much.'

'Was it the sort of stuff that someone could have slipped into his glass?' Roger asked.

'I suppose they might,' Inspector Murphy said. 'But there's no evidence at all that anybody would be wanting to do a thing like that. As far as we can find out so far he had little enough money, there was no sign of robbery, he had no entanglements with women. He had acquaintances in

plenty – he'll be sorely missed – but no close friends in the city besides yourself.'

'Yes, that's probably true,' Roger said.

'Now, I'd like to get any evidence I can about the state of his mind. You said last night that you had thought he had been a bit depressed like in the past half year or so, wasn't that it?'

'Yes. Yes, I did. But I can't tell you any more. He seemed a bit irritable on occasion. Other people must have noticed it. Ask them here. Ask his lab assistant.'

'I'm after doing that,' said Inspector Murphy. 'He did remember an incident two or three months back when Mr Smith smashed a test tube or something like that. He thought he did it in a rage.'

'Yes, I think I remember the incident too. It was just one sign that Eric was unusually irritable.'

'Normally he was a calm sort of person then?'

'No, not exactly calm. He could get very excited about things. But he had a cheerful temperament. He didn't get upset.'

'But in the past half year he has been worried, although you had no knowledge what the trouble was?'

'That's it exactly.'

'I see.'

Inspector Murphy looked up quickly. Sharp eyes in the pale face.

'You can't pin down anything that happened some time in the summer that would account for it?'

'No.'

An unequivocal statement.

'I see. Nothing at all?'

'Nothing.'

'No letter received here or at his home?'

'If there had been I'd have been unlikely to know.'

'Of course, of course.'

The inspector stood up. He looked at the glowing turf fire as if reluctant to leave it.

'Well,' he said, 'it's not as satisfactory as I'd like but if I can't do any better before the inquest that'll have to be it. We'll inform you when the inquest's to be held. You'll be wanted to give evidence. He seemed to have no relations at all so far as we can find out.'

Roger walked across to the door with the inspector. As he put his hand on the handle the inspector said:

'Ah. One thing more. Notes. There wasn't one here for you, was there by any chance?'

'No, there was nothing.'

'Ah well. And nothing at your flat?'

'No.'

'I see.'

He went out into the chilly hall.

'And nothing at Mr Smith's flat? Nothing that you might have forgotten last night?'

'No, nothing whatsoever.'

'Good night so.'

'Good evening.'

The inspector swung the wide front door of the School open just enough for his slim body to slip through. He closed it behind him slowly and quietly.

The academic calm of the cold hall under the fine plasterwork ceiling.

Roger stood lost in thought.

The motionless figure with the stooping shoulders, thickening waist and unlikely fair hair. The chill calm of the classically proportioned hall. The silence of the still air.

The inner turbulence. The whirling thoughts. The hunched determined rider forcing his dark steed onwards through the turmoil of the black storm.

It was three days later, on the Thursday, that Roger became aware that he was being followed.

He had left the School about five in the evening and was walking part of the way home to call in at a dry cleaner's in Grafton Street to collect a suit he had left there. There were plenty of people about with office workers leaving to go home and shoppers intent on making last purchases. For this reason presumably the man following Roger had had to risk getting quite close in case his quarry should go into one of the bigger shops and come out by a second entrance.

He was a squat man with immensely broad shoulders and a thin pointed face wedged deeply between them. He wore an old flat cap. In spite of the cold he had no overcoat. His greasy-looking jacket was buttoned tight and at his throat he had a knotted scarf. He might have been a docker.

Roger had first noticed him at the moment he left the School. He was standing on the other side of the square and would normally have been invisible at that time of the evening as he had chosen a pitch between two street lamps. But just at the moment that Roger had come out of the School a car on the far side of the square had switched on its full headlights. The beams had fallen full on the man for perhaps three seconds, and in that time they had shown him in an unmistakable all-black silhouette. There was something misproportioned about him that marked him out, something to do with the immense width of the shoulders and the narrowness of the wedge-shaped head between them.

Roger had thought no more about him and had certainly not noticed him again until a few yards into Grafton Street his attention had been caught by a display in a shop

window. Under a painted sign saying 'Medical Hall', flanked by two flask-shaped bottles of red and green liquid there was a tall pyramid of a new slimming product. Roger spent some time reading the accompanying advertisement. The crowds were thick at this point and the docker must have had to close in.

Abruptly Roger decided that he was not after all really fat. He turned to go, only to find that a mother wheeling a pram had pushed it right up against the shop window in his path. To get clear he had to turn and face back in the direction he had come from. He caught the docker under the full light of a street lamp, standing waiting.

But it was not until he went into the cleaner's to fetch his suit that it occurred to him that the man's presence was more than a coincidence. He was in the shop a long time. Something had gone wrong about his ticket. The counterfoil he had handed in corresponded to a violently striped Italian-style jacket and a long search proved necessary to locate his own dark grey suit.

He was standing patiently at the counter while the sole assistant, a tiny little shrew of a woman, bustled up and down along the rows of hanging garments making vicious little pokes at them here and there. Suddenly he chanced to look up, and there standing in a doorway exactly opposite was the unmistakable form of the docker.

When at last the little shrew found his suit, he decided that he would prove his suspicions by walking all the way home. He lived in a flat just off the head of O'Connell Street, farther off than anyone would choose to walk for a stroll. He had chosen it when he first came to Dublin and discovered that all his colleagues lived south of the river. Since he had acquired Cuchulain it had been doubly worthwhile. The furniture could take the rough and tumble of life with a wolfhound a great deal better than any he would have found in the more expensive areas on the other side of the Liffey.

By the time he arrived at the house and climbed the familiar steps of the porch with its columns on either side and the fanlight with the broken pane, which had gone unmended for three years to his definite knowledge, he was feeling very weary. The muscles at the top of his legs ached and he was sweating under his thick overcoat. But he had proved beyond doubt that the docker was following him.

He had had several glimpses of him as he had pushed his way through the crowds converging on O'Connell Bridge and he had noticed him dodging into a patch of shadow just as he turned off O'Connell Street into the maze of narrow ways where his flat was situated. And at each turning after that he had seen the man again.

Now with Cuchulain standing up beside him trying to lick his face by way of welcome he looked out of the window of the flat. Just distinguishable in the depths of the doorway opposite there was a broad-shouldered figure with a wedgeshaped head.

Roger went back into the room and telephoned the Guards barracks on the other side of the Liffey. He asked to speak to Inspector Murphy. In a short while he was put through.

'Listen, inspector,' he said, 'you haven't any doubts about me, have you?'

'Doubts? What class of doubts would I be having about you, Mr Farrar?'

'I'll tell you why I ask. I was followed home tonight.'

'Ach, you're getting jumpy, Mr Farrar. Why should we want to follow you at all? I suppose you're thinking we suspect you of murdering your friend. Is that it?'

'Well, I couldn't think of any other possibility.'

'All right so. Now look, the inquest is at noon tomorrow. I've put a letter in the post for you about it. When you're

there you'll hear me tell the Coroner I've no doubts it was suicide. Will that satisfy you?'

'Then who's following me?'

'No one at all, Mr Farrar.'

'But I assure you -'

'Now, you forget all about it. You're upset by your friend's death, and why wouldn't you be? But things'll look brighter in the morning.'

'Well, if you promise me it's nothing to do with the Guards.'

'Sure, we've better things to do than to follow a harmless citizen when there's nothing we need to know about him.'

'That's what I thought. What should you want to have me followed for?'

'That's better now. You're altogether more rational.'

'But if I'm right ...'

'Then point out your man to me if he's followed you to the inquest and I'll know what to do to the like of him. If he exists at all.'

'All right. Sorry to have troubled you.'

'Not at all, not at all.'

Roger slept badly that night. He had not slept well since he had found Eric's body, but this had been even worse. It was not until six in the morning that he fell deeply asleep. When he woke up it was past ten. He looked out of the window of his sitting-room.

The docker was not there.

Roger fed Cuchulain, dressed, and hurried out. On his way to the School he took every opportunity of looking behind him. But nothing gave him reason to believe that anyone was following him, let alone the broad-shouldered docker.

As he reached the School he wore a slight frown of annoyance. Could Inspector Murphy have been right after all?

He looked across the square at the place where the evening before he had first caught a chance glimpse of the docker. Was it possible that that unmistakable silhouette had been a freak of light, the start of a hallucination?

And there was his man again.

Not particularly noticeable standing quietly beside a tree, but to the accustomed eye standing out like a tiny black spot of ink on some huge unsmirched picture.

Chapter Five

Roger turned and ran.

He stumbled down the steps of the School to the pavement, and set off as hard as he could go in the direction that would take him away from the lurking figure on the other side of the square.

He ran.

He ran without care, without taking advantage of turnings off the straight path which would give him a chance to get right away from his pursuer before the distance between them had narrowed.

Not until he began to struggle for breath did he even turn round to see if he was being followed. But when he did so he realized in an instant that the figure with the narrow wedge-shaped head between the immensely broad shoulders was no figment of the imagination. The man was pounding after him down the street. The suddenness of his flight had put concealment out of the question. The docker was blatantly running after him. And he was running much the faster.

Already a sharp jabbing pain had started up in Roger's right side. He was breathing in shallow gasps. His face was streaked with sweat. The tall green iron lamp-posts looked like refuges of coolness. To stand leaning against one of them with the cold iron against the hotness of his cheek with his hands locked round it in final mute refusal.

One more. The next one.

Suddenly he saw out of the corner of his eye that there was a gap in the stream of traffic flowing in the road beside him.

He nipped across smartly. Without weariness.

The cars behind raced exuberantly forward into the free space. The gap disappeared. The docker was on the far side of the road. A respite.

Roger looked round to see if he could spot a taxi. At the far end of the street he thought he saw a car which looked like one going slowly enough to be cruising. He set off towards it, but it swung crazily into the stream of traffic on the other side of the road and vanished.

The disturbance caused by this common enough example of anarchic individualism halted the traffic flow for a moment and Roger saw the broad-shouldered form of the docker diving into the temporary pool of stillness in the hurrying stream.

He turned and began moving away in the opposite direction at a loping run adopted to prevent a recurrence of the jabbing pain in his side. The docker was too near him now to make a turn off the more frequented street worthwhile. He increased his pace a little.

The tall houses looked blankly on.

And suddenly a way of escape presented itself. A way of startling simplicity.

Roger's course had brought him to Kildare Street. On his right lay the wide quadrangle of Leinster House with the symmetrical buildings of the National Library and the National Museum flanking it. Roger saw in an instant that in the torpid quietness of the museum the dirty figure of the docker would attract the immediate attention of every attendant in sight. While he himself with all the signs of scholarliness about him - the frayed suit, the pale complexion, the thickening waist - would be on Tom Tiddler's ground.

He turned to go through the open iron gates. As he did so out of the corner of his eye he saw a taxi idling down the

street behind him. He halted, undecided which method of evasion was better.

The conventional taxi. The unconventional refuge of the museum. The possibility that the docker might be able to get hold of another taxi and follow him as relentlessly as before. The sudden doubt that the tedious calm of the museum would be really effective against the threat of brute force implicit in the docker's enormously broad shoulders.

Then Roger saw that in point of fact the taxi was not idling. It had an occupant, someone sitting far back, and for some reason the driver had abandoned the usual bestman-win style of Dublin driving in favour of a chugging crawl. Engine trouble probably.

Roger turned again and made for the wide steps and massive pillars of the museum entrance.

But his hesitation had given the running figure of the docker a new chance. He who hesitates a fraction is almost lost.

In the bustling sedateness of Kildare Street the docker launched himself towards Roger. Silent, purposeful.

And Roger put on a burst of speed which he would not have believed himself capable of. The pounding heart, the wide open mouth, the tired muscles working.

Past a motley collection of ancient carved stones, through the heavy colonnade, and inside.

The faint warmth after the coldness of the fresh air. The sacred silence. The emptiness.

Roger dropped into a quick walk. The aching muscles still in the rhythm of running. Past a huge white marble Pietà – pray for us – and on into the main hall. An attendant, almost asleep under his peaked cap, looked up at him.

The noise of the docker's pounding feet on the stone floor. Suddenly coming to a flummoxed halt. Without looking

back, Roger hurried on. Ogham stones, flint implements, bone ornaments, tubs of bog-butter.

‘Still in a remarkable state of preservation.’ The traditional words of the guide book.

Querns and domestic articles from the early Middle Ages, a gaming board of yew, bronze swords.

Roger halted beside this display.

A vision of a puffing, fattening student of linguistics wielding a sword dating from the Bronze Age to fight off the attacks of an immensely broad-shouldered slum dweller.

He turned and hurried on. The pursuing steps of the docker were no longer to be heard, but the need to get as far as possible away from them was instinctive and urgent. At last he heard with relief the muffled sound of an altercation. Three twanging Dublin voices. The docker, no doubt, and two attendants.

Axe-heads with silver appliqué ornamentation, bronze trumpets, sepulchral urns. A long dug-out canoe.

The ridiculousness of boyish adventuring.

Roger stopped and faced the way he had come. The whole museum was sleeping its long winter sleep. The brash invasion of the tourists only a nightmare dream. Chill peace.

Roger went very slowly down from the raised terrace into the central area of the hall. He began to examine the display cases with attention. Feigned at first, soon real.

He was lost in thought over a case labelled ‘Development of the Penannular Brooch or Fibula (Sixth to Tenth Centuries)’ when a quiet voice came from a couple of yards away behind his back.

‘You’re looking decidedly fatter.’

A high, piping, unmistakable voice.

Roger swung round.

The Bosun. Standing there, leaning insolently on a stout ornamental walking-stick, swathed in a tent-like overcoat in startling black and white check.

‘What – What are you doing here?’

‘My dear fellow, I’ve every right to be here, you know. This is a public museum, open between the hours of 11 a.m. and 5 p.m.’

‘Oh, don’t pretend you came here out of a passionate interest in the antiquities of Ireland.’

‘Well ...’

The piping, drawling voice.

‘Well, I do know a certain amount about such matters, of course. Let me advise you, while we’re on the subject, to complete your present study by looking at the Tara Brooch, which is kept over there – unless they’ve moved anything since I was last here, which I don’t think in the least likely. The Tara is probably the richest examp –’

‘You followed me here.’

An accusation.

The Bosun’s little slit mouth curved in a smile.

‘Of course I did,’ he said quietly. ‘I’m afraid my emissary didn’t feel quite up to penetrating these rather depressing purlieus. But luckily I was close behind him in a taxi – and causing the most frightful jams by having to go so slowly, incidentally – and I was able to take over from him. He’s waiting outside. A decidedly useful person. But more at home in the docks than in a museum. I picked him up in a bar.’

‘Was it him who killed Eric for you then?’ Roger said.

The angry words echoing round the wide, cold spaces of the deserted museum.

One of the attendants put his head round the doorway. At the sight of two respectable figures in disagreement over

the development of the penannular brooch he withdrew.

A disturbing morning.

'Killed Eric?' said the Bosun. 'I don't quite follow.'

His pained expression. Donned.

'Oh, come off it,' said Roger. 'Don't let's pretend we don't understand each other. You found out where Eric was. You didn't trust him not to tell the world your nasty secret. You killed him. And if I can, I'll see you don't get away with it.'

He fumbled in his inside pocket and brought out his wallet. He flipped it sprawling open and with clumsy fingers jerked out of it a small white square of pasteboard.

'Here's your trademark,' he said.

The white fire of anger.

The Bosun slowly shook his head from side to side. The great pink balloon swaying as if caught in a chance wind.

'But will anybody else except you say he was killed?' he asked.

'Nobody but you would have gone to the trouble to have a card printed describing himself as J. Parkinson Crowle, the Southampton Rapist,' Roger said.

The Bosun's sausage fingers patted his startling check overcoat in delight.

'I'm so glad you got that card,' he said. 'I had it left specially for your benefit. I knew you would know where it came from. Because I really think that no one else in the whole wide world would have hit on those two little words in the bottom right-hand corner. "By Appointment". I think I really surpassed myself there.'

'You surpassed yourself,' Roger said. 'Yes, you did. You went beyond yourself. You went too far. You killed Eric, killed him in cold blood. And now that I've found you, you're bloody well going to pay for it.'

The pink sausages splayed out in a gesture of mock horror.

‘An alibi, an alibi,’ the Bosun piped. ‘My dear fellow, you don’t think I didn’t make sure I had a splendid alibi for the whole of the period Eric – you seem to have quite got into the way of calling him that – was likely to die. I was in London the whole time, mostly in the bosom of the Athenaeum. The Government pays my subscription, you know. I helped a bishop with his crossword, I discussed Church appointments with a terribly respectable radical don. I took every precaution.’

‘All right. You used your agents –’

‘Agents? My agents? You know we haven’t taken to melodrama at Leeds since you – er – left us. Our budget may be quite generous, as after all it should be considering the importance of our work. But it doesn’t rise to a secret service of dedicated murderers. No, I have to take whatever comes to hand.’

A conspiratorial smile from the little slit mouth.

‘That’s why I used our friend from the docks to keep an eye on you. He’s cheap. Cheap and really very nasty.’

‘Oh, stop this. Don’t tell me that if you wanted it you couldn’t have all the help you wanted from M.I. 5 or M.I. 6 or whoever it is.’

‘But I do tell you. You know what civil servants are. They wouldn’t stand for anything smacking of personal direction in such matters from me. Everything would have to go through the proper channels. That’s why I prefer to do things unofficially. It’s in the best traditions, I assure you. From what I hear England is riddled with unofficial counterespionage and intelligence groups. I just happen to have a tiny one of my very own.’

The Bosun stuck his ornamental walking-stick under one arm and began unbuttoning the garish black and white

overcoat. Chipolata fingers fumbling with the stiff buttons.

‘And you just happened to commit a tiny murder of your very own,’ said Roger.

He took an impulsive step towards the bloated figure.

The Bosun looked at him quizzically from beneath his pale gold eyebrows.

‘You must just accustom yourself to the fact that the fellow had to die,’ he said.

‘Had to die.’

The final insult.

Roger leapt forward, hands reaching out for the fat flesh of the Bosun’s neck.

And at his own neck a gleaming sword point.

Six inches beneath his eyes, checking him absolutely in the wild flurry of his rush, the steadily held swordstick.

Its ornamental sheath dropped with a hollow clatter on to the stone floor.

‘I’m not a fool,’ the Bosun said.

Roger backed a step.

A curling grin spread on the Bosun’s slit of a mouth. He advanced an equal step. The shining length of the sword held without the least tremor. The point an inch from Roger’s windpipe.

‘You won’t get away with it,’ Roger said.

The hoarse whisper.

The sword point advanced three-eighths of an inch.

‘As a matter of fact I shall.’

‘This time you haven’t got an alibi. You aren’t in the Athenaeum now. You may kill me –’

‘Kill you? My dear fellow.’

A slow look of dawning understanding, beautifully managed.

'You thought I had decided to deal with you in the same way as – what am I to call him? – Ah yes, as Eric Smith. You know, you couldn't possibly be more mistaken.'

Roger's look of blank surprise.

'How awful of me, my dear fellow. You must forgive me. I had no idea, or I would have explained straight away.'

'Explained what?'

Roger was no longer making any attempt to keep on even terms.

'Explained the difference between Eric Smith and Roger Farrar. That is right, isn't it, Roger Farrar? The names seem to ring a faint bell, I can't think why.'

'Yes,' said Roger, 'I choose to call myself Roger Farrar.'

'But, of course. I quite understand. You couldn't afford your real name appearing on some academic list or other if you wanted to stay concealed so near my eagle eye. I can forgive that.'

The sword point retreated three-eighths of an inch.

'Well, what do you want?' Roger said.

'You. I want you. I want you back.'

'Well, you can go on wanting.'

A slight return of aggressive instinct.

The hard eyes in the puffy pink flesh narrowed.

'I mean you to come back,' the Bosun said.

'All right, I can see that you're very determined. But I'm equally determined. I am not coming back. The whole Leeds project is evil. Evil. I mean to have no part in it.'

The Bosun lowered his sword.

'You know,' he said in a conversational tone, 'I think you don't quite appreciate the difference between us. You tell me you are as much determined to stay here as I am that you shall come back to Leeds. But you lack the necessary

ruthlessness, my dear chap. Don't forget, I know all about you. You didn't work under me all those years for nothing.'

'Perhaps I'm different now.'

'The tiny curving smile in the balloon face.

'We shall see. I want you back. I'm prepared to go to quite considerable lengths to get you. I'm prepared if necessary to accept damaged goods, to damage them myself even, provided that they can be repaired when we all get back to Leeds.'

'I warn you: threats won't do you any good.'

'Oh, I never supposed they would. But I wasn't threatening: I was promising.'

The sword blade flicked up again. Pointing higher this time. On a level with Roger's eyes but held to the side of his face.

'Let me teach you a little lesson,' the Bosun said.

The even tone of the piping voice.

The sword moving evenly forward.

The sharp pain at the edge of Roger's ear.

He jerked his head aside.

'Oh, come,' said the Bosun, 'keep still. Less melodrama. It was only the merest nick. You've done worse shaving.'

The sword darting back and darting forward again. Held now level with the other ear.

'Now, you'd better exercise a little more self-control this time, or you might find yourself without an ear.'

Roger staring at a point just above the Bosun's head, fixed on the curl of a medieval crozier fastened to the distant wall. The rigid face. White, gleaming pallidly with sweat.

The sword slowly moving forward. The expected burning touch of pain at the ear edge.

The sword lowered. A dark stain marring the straight shining blade.

‘You see, my dear chap,’ the Bosun said, ‘it’s this way: your friend Eric knew too much to be allowed to live, but you know too much to be allowed to die.’

‘I don’t want to bandy riddles,’ Roger said.

Sullenly.

The Bosun pouted. A spoilt child, blown-up.

‘You used to enjoy a certain allusiveness in conversation in the old days,’ he said.

‘No,’ said Roger, ‘not sentimentality, please.’

‘But they were good old days. They still are good days. I cannot understand what possessed you to go running off like that.’

A shimmer of wrinkles on the broad balloon brow. Genuine incomprehension.

‘Look,’ the Bosun said, ‘I’m asking you to come back. That’s what I’m here for. I’m sorry about your Eric, but, as I said, he knew too much. Anyone from the spearhead team was just too important to take risks over. Even though he gave nothing away it was too dangerous to allow him to continue to exist.’

The podgy fingers waving in a gesture of deprecation.

‘But you’re different, old man. Naturally, I wouldn’t be too delighted to have details of what your branch was doing fall into the wrong hands. But you’ve evidently decided to say nothing of the grand design. That was sensible. And the fact is that we cannot do without your knowledge of linguistics. There’s no one at Leeds to touch you, dear boy. Please, won’t you come back. Please.’

‘You make me sick,’ Roger said. ‘Pleading for your vile institute as if it were a home for lost dogs. That’s why we had to leave the way we did, to go to ground, to disappear:

you would never have been within miles of understanding our reasons.'

'Nonsense,' said the Bosun sharply. 'I understand your reasons perfectly well. With the late - er - Eric Smith it was lack of promotion, but then he never rated it. And with you it was simply a craving for public recognition. Well, you know the diffiic -'

'Listen to me, just listen. Just try to take in what I'm saying.'

Roger shouting into the pink balloon face.

'I disagree with your whole show, fundamentally and absolutely. The foul experiments that went on just round the corner and spending my every waking hour tinkering with words for what you were pleased to call warlike purposes. It was making me sick, sick to death.'

On the pink face the almost imperceptible pale gold eyebrows rose.

'It was lack of leisure, was it?' the Bosun said. 'My dear fellow, I confess I'd got hold of completely the wrong end of the stick. But if you want extra time off I'm sure it could be arranged. Of course, as you know, we've a hell of a lot to do and time is always precious. We've got to get this thing perfected, you know. Then we can beat them all.'

'Beat them all. That just about sums you up. That's the only way you know how to think. The new way of warfare. Britain must have the edge on everybody.'

'My dear fellow, are you saying that that shouldn't be so? Ireland must have softened your brain. Just think back to the fundamentals. You wouldn't want to see Russia winning a war, would you? Or America, for heaven's sake. Come, you must know Britain, with all her faults, is the only power fit to be trusted.'

'The only power. That's the sort of blindness I sought refuge here from. Can't you see: linguistics should never be

part of a secret weapon? It's criminal to think in that way.'

'Linguistics for peace, eh? Ireland has done something to your mind. It must be the soft days, as they call them. The gradual seepage of fine mist into the cerebellum. The sooner you come back to Leeds and a little realism the better. That sort of slogan stuff is simply one of the elementary tools of your own trade: you can't allow yourself to be deceived by it. It's like a master carpenter hitting his finger with a hammer.'

'I didn't work for months on the uses of the word "peace" without knowing it was a weapon, thank you very much. That's just why it took me so long to see it also meant something. It isn't only a word, you know: it's something that could exist. And the same goes for all the other words you so much love to see being monkeyed around with by stupid stooges like me. Well, I'm no longer a stooge. Ireland has done something for me, if you like. It's given me a chance to look at you from a distance.'

'A distance? My dear chap, we shall have to give you some sort of rehabilitation course. You can't surely really think that Ireland is distant from Britain. Why, that's the crudest sort of propaganda put out in the pre-scientific days. You of all people can't have fallen for it.'

'It happens to be true. Ireland actually is a different country from your set-up over there.'

The Bosun smiled.

'My dear fellow, Ireland is simply the last English eccentricity. Just wake up.'

'No, you don't see it. Ireland is a place where things can be done slowly and carefully. Where little by little -'

'Stop.'

The slit mouth curving into a slow smile.

'Little by Little. It's been puzzling me ever since I heard those ridiculous names you two gave yourselves. I suppose

they were your idea. It's the book by Dean Farrar, of course. The author provided your surname, and Smith's Christian name came from the title, "Eric, or Little by Little". My dear fellow, I do congratulate you, a really pretty conceit.'

The curved slit mouth straightened.

'Only the philosophy behind it simply won't do, of course. If we went about doing everything little by little we'd lose out in a couple of years. My dear chap, it's all or nothing, you know. There's not room in the world for anything else. And of course ...'

The high, piping voice dropped to quietness.

'... of course, it's all or nothing for you too.'

Chapter Six

Suddenly the Bosun stopped. The great blimp canting awkwardly forward.

He scrabbled at the ornamental sheath of the swordstick with fat, ineffectual fingers and at last succeeded in getting a grip on it. He straightened up and made an effort to return the sword to its home.

His hands trembling from the strain of bending. The dark smear on the edge of the blade lost at last in the sheath. He looked over at Roger.

‘You’d better use your handkerchief on those ears,’ he said. ‘You’re dripping blood all over the floor.’

Roger mechanically feeling in his pocket, pulling out a handkerchief, dabbing at the two wounds. Conscious that the handkerchief had not been white in the first place.

‘I think we’ll finish our conversation elsewhere,’ the Bosun said. ‘I don’t like the sight of blood you know.’

He gestured with the ornamental stick at the spattered drops on the floor and then towards the inner depths of the museum. Roger went in the direction he had indicated.

In the faint warmth a sudden profuse sweating. With every movement his trunk stuck momentarily to his vest.

And padding after him came the Bosun, walking very softly in spite of his enormous size as if his puffed-out body was really filled with some lighter-than-air gas.

‘This will do.’

Roger came to a halt at the foot of a small winding staircase with running through its well a thin section cut from a peat bog, light brown at the top grading down to

near blackness at the bottom. He yielded to an irresistible temptation to sink down and sit on the second stair.

He put his head between his hands and waited till he felt better able to deal with the situation once again.

The Bosun gave a sharp little cough and he looked up.

The Bosun was standing fat legs astraddle, looking speculatively down at him. The startling tented overcoat hung wide showing the top trouser button open as usual and a patch of white shirt billowing out like the sail of a great East Indiaman running before a fair wind.

‘Well now,’ he said, ‘I can’t spend all day idling here. It’s bloody depressing, you know.’

He looked round belligerently.

‘They want to clear ninety per cent of this appalling junk out. A museum is a scientific instrument, not a national reliquary. Look at that absurd slice of bog beside you. Only the Irish could wish to remind themselves of the slime they have scarcely dragged themselves out of.’

Roger looked at the strip of peat in its long, narrow glass case with the wooden measured rule running up into the gloom high above his head.

‘It interests me,’ he said.

The Bosun puffed out a long scornful breath. His little pursed-up cherub’s lips.

‘It’s certainly time you left Ireland,’ he said. ‘But we don’t want to create a lot of fuss. Discretion is the thing to aim for. So you’d better take your time. Put in your resignation from that tinpot academic establishment and pay your bills, and I’ll book you a seat in the Manchester plane for next Saturday. In the meanwhile I shall stay to keep a friendly eye on you.’

Roger’s wintry smile in the winter gloom of the museum.

‘And what about the murder you’ve committed?’ he said.

One of the attendants tramped by. His footsteps clonking hollowly. He blew on his hands.

Roger waited till he had turned the corner.

‘You know,’ he said, ‘I ought to have realized that you hadn’t really got any serious designs on my life. I should have known that you wouldn’t have been within a hundred miles of the spot if you had decided to have me killed.’

‘Now then, don’t get uppish. I’ve shown you once that I don’t mind hurting people. Next time I shall hurt you rather more.’

Roger shook his head in disagreement.

‘No, I don’t think so,’ he said. ‘You went about as far as you could. Anything more and you’d have been bound to have drawn attention to yourself. If this was England you might be able to pull strings and hush things up. But it isn’t England: it’s Ireland. There are plenty of people here who would be very pleased to show up the British Government in a nasty light. So the cards are by no means all stacked in your favour.’

The Bosun’s face looking down at him, deep pinky red, balloon-shaped, with the pale gold hair scarcely visible in the murk of the museum. The tiny slit mouth was closed hard, making a short uncompromising gash.

‘Listen,’ he said in a hissing whisper, ‘I need you at Leeds. I make no attempt to disguise it. You could speed things up a lot, and I want them speeded up. But, if it comes to choosing between you and the safety of the whole enterprise, you don’t count for as much as that.’

The pudgy fingers snapping in the chill air.

‘I dealt with your friend Eric,’ he went on, raising his voice slightly, ‘and I shan’t hesitate, if you drive me to it, to deal with you.’

‘If I’ve kept my mouth shut for three years,’ Roger said, ‘it’s pretty likely, isn’t it, that I’ll go on keeping it shut? That

was the condition Eric and I made between us when we left. We reckoned we were entitled to chuck it all provided we didn't betray any trust. Why else do you think I took that card from Eric's body? I could have told the Guards what it meant. When I saw Eric lying there dead, that was my first thought. But in the end I decided our unwritten compact still stood. If I said nothing about the work at Leeds I was justified in opting out.'

He gripped the cool glass of the display case beside him.

'It was a simple personal decision,' he went on. 'When you start going beyond that, you end up saying "All of us are right, and all of you are wrong." That's what you've done. I'm not going to do the same thing.'

A faint frown on the bulging flesh above the pale gold eyebrows.

'Dear me, I can see I have miscalculated a little. Yours is really quite a serious case. I shall have to speak to my informant. I've been led astray.'

'Your informant?'

A dart of unease. The unknown eye, the hidden microphone, the two-way mirror.

The Bosun smiled. His slit mouth curving almost into a semi-circle.

'Well, what did you expect?' he said. 'I had to leave an informant. I needed access to your records at the School of Further Studies. I needed to know if either of you had used any material you had worked on under my aegis. Indeed, my - er representative is still with you. If I called them off, it would give away my little secret. And I never like to do that.'

'So there's a traitor.'

'Traitor? Isn't that a little strong?'

'No, it is not. Not to my mind. The School is one point of sanity in a world gone mad. The thought of a hireling of you totalist megalomaniacs working there revolts me.'

‘Now, you’ve got to get these ideas out of your head. After all, you’ll be working for a totalist megalomaniac yourself again in a few days – if I may so describe myself.’

‘I will not be working for you. Understand that. I have left you and all you represent for ever. My last concern with you will be to get rid of this traitor you have infiltrated into my world, this infiltrator, if you like –’

‘My dear fellow, I do like. I like very much. Infiltrator. You’ve lost nothing of your touch with the words. You must come back.’

‘No.’

The shout echoing in the high deserted halls of the museum.

The Bosun waited for it to die away. Then he smiled.

A bloated cat.

‘There is one thing I think you really ought to bear in mind,’ he said. ‘You know it was my Infiltrator – what a splendid word – who acted for me over your friend Eric. I wouldn’t want to get them to act over you.’

‘A murderer too, I might have guessed it.’

‘Well, that’s a ticklish point actually. You see the little episode of the poison in the stout bottle was presented as a mere practical joke. The stuff was always spoken of as The Emetic. Now I can’t for the life of me be sure whether my Infiltrator knew beforehand what the stuff really was or not. If he did, he was a murderer, as you say. But if not, he was only a very sensible accessory after the fact.’

The Bosun’s pudgy fingers brushing the point aside in the chill air.

‘But all this is neither here nor there,’ he went on. ‘The point is that I’ve been led into handling you wrongly. I had no idea, absolutely no idea, that you had this extraordinary sentimental attachment to your place of work. I thought it was just a convenient, even rather clever, hideyhole for you.’

That was why I tried to frighten you. With the card, you know, and then putting my docker friend on to pursue you in that bloodhoundy way all over the place –'

'So I was meant to spot him?'

'Of course.'

'And was I to tell the Guards that I had?'

'The Guards? You mean the police? You told them?'

Roger heaved himself up off the stair he had been sitting on.

'Certainly I told them,' he said. 'I thought it was just possible that he came from them, I had to check. And, of course, it makes no difference because I told the man in charge of the case that I would see him at the inquest. It's at twelve o'clock. If I don't go at once I shall be late. And if I don't turn up at all, what will he think?'

The Bosun gave a brief smile.

'You seem to have won this round, my dear fellow. I saw that the inquest was today. I certainly shan't attempt to detain you. However I expect I shall see you again before I leave for Leeds.'

The slit mouth hardening.

Roger turned on his heel and hurried off. One of the attendants looked up with decided irritation as he swept past him on his way out. The Bosun followed, pit-patting across the stone-flagged floors.

When Roger got out into the cold of the winter's day the first thing he saw was the docker. He was standing in the wide quadrangle watching the heavy pillars of the museum from the shelter of the symmetrically heavy pillars of the National Library and beating his arms together to keep himself warm.

At the sight of Roger he stopped abruptly and advanced. With menace.

‘Down, sir, down,’ the Bosun called.

The effeminacy of the high, piping voice.

The docker halted at its sound. The breath from his nostrils making a little cloud in the chill air. A baffled bulldog.

‘That’s right,’ the Bosun went on. ‘We’re leaving him alone now. But don’t forget what he looks like. Mark him, boy, mark him.’

Chapter Seven

When the Coroner announced a verdict of suicide on Eric Smith, Roger shrugged his shoulders. There had been no evidence of murder and none of accident. There had been precious little evidence of suicide. Only rat poison never gets into a bottle of stout by magic.

Afterwards Inspector Murphy came up. His pale face lurking like a ghost in the shadows of a thick overcoat.

Roger was now accompanied by Cuchulain. The inspector looked at the giant wolfhound with mistrust.

‘Well now,’ he said, ‘how are we this morning?’

Roger smiled.

‘I successfully accounted for the man I saw,’ he said. ‘He was real right enough, though. It turns out he lives near me. He’s a bit simple it seems, and he took it into his head to follow me. I just happen never to have noticed him before.’

The inspector moved round so as to put Roger between himself and Cuchulain, who had begun to sniff at his trouser leg.

‘Well, that’s one little mystery cleared up anyway,’ he said. ‘I wish they were all so easy.’

‘Like the mystery of Eric Smith’s death?’

The sharp eyes in the pale face flicked up at Roger.

‘No,’ the inspector said, ‘there’s loose ends enough there, God knows, but nothing to worry about.’

The sharp eyes again asked for an answer.

Roger took an extra turn of Cuchulain’s leash round his wrist.

‘You’re right, of course,’ he said. ‘There could have only been one verdict.’

‘You’re right so. Well now, I must be getting back to a few of those other little puzzles awaiting me. It’s a hard life, surely.’

He backed away still looking mistrustfully at the hulking form of the wolfhound.

The atmosphere in the big bedroom was intolerably stuffy. The grate in the fireplace was in the form of an iron basket and when the wind was in the north nothing could be done to keep the fire down. It burnt any fuel that was put on it – coal or turf – at an alarming rate.

It was far too cold to open either of the big sash windows across which the heavy green chenille curtains were two-thirds drawn. Although the short winter day was coming to an end and the light was failing no lamps had been switched on and the room was so dark it was difficult to make out what was in the corners.

Only the towering mahogany furniture loomed through the dimness and two areas of white proclaimed themselves. One was a towel draping the collection of medicines and sickroom utensils on a card table set against the wall opposite the windows. The other was the huge mound of white pillows at the head of the double bed covered with the dark purple eiderdown.

Breaking the smooth white mass of the pillows was the slim yellowish oval of the invalid’s face. It was so drained of colour and the room was so dim that Roger could scarcely distinguish the familiar features.

He leant forward on the stiff bedroom chair that had been set for him near to the big bed.

‘I’m afraid I’ve come to bother you, sir,’ he said quietly.

He looked closely at the yellowish oval of the sick man's face. A slight flicker of the eyelids was visible. An acknowledgement.

'You heard about Eric Smith,' Roger went on. 'The - the -'

He hesitated for the word, and then plunged.

'The nurse, the nun, told me they had let you know. What I wanted to see -'

He stopped.

The emaciated yellow hand lying on the purple eiderdown had suddenly been raised in an imperious gesture.

But for some time the invalid said nothing. Then the voice came. The familiar rich Irish tones, but as if strained through innumerable fine meshes.

'Eric Smith was a good man. He gave up much to come to the School. He made a hard decision.'

Roger waited. But the sick man said no more.

'Professor O Nuallain,' Roger began again, 'you remember me speaking about Bosenwite, the director of the Institute at Leeds?'

Silence signifying assent.

'When he came over in the summer Eric gave away our existence. Now Bosenwite is over here again. I was talking to him this morning. He admitted that he was responsible for Eric's death.'

The yellowish face on the great mound of white pillows began to raise itself with horrible slowness. From the chair in the darkest corner of the room the figure of the nun swept forward. In a moment she was beside the sick man. A cool hand gently pressing the forehead back on to the pillows.

She turned to Roger.

'Sure now, you're after disturbing the professor. I'll have to have you out from this if you do it again.'

The almost stage Irish coming from beneath the classic shape of the black coif with the white stiff linen border. Totally unexpected.

Roger looked at her suspiciously. The mysterious, unknowable life.

'I - I'm very sorry,' he said. 'I'll try not to do it again. But this is really very important. I wouldn't have come if it hadn't been.'

'Dr O'Malley said you could come, the dear man,' the nun replied.

She glided back to her corner in the gloom.

Roger leant forward towards the emaciated form of Professor O Nuallain again.

The failing mechanical body dragging down with it the trenchant, simple spirit.

'Don't trouble yourself about Eric, sir,' he said. 'If there is anything that can be done, you can be sure I shall do it.'

The flicker of the eyelids. The minimal sign of acknowledgement.

'It's something else, another aspect, that I have asked to see you about,' Roger resumed.

He paused.

'I gathered from what Bosenwite was saying to me this morning that he had found out a great deal about Eric and myself from someone he had got into the School.'

Again the hand on the suffocating purple eiderdown was raised to halt the flow of Roger's speech.

And the pale shadow of the professor's polychromatic West of Ireland accent.

'Wrong. It is wrong. Very wrong.'

'You mean you don't believe -'

'No.'

The sound quite loud in the big stuffy room.

‘No, if you say so I believe you. I know you. But it is wrong that anybody should have learnt about you. What you two were and where you came from was a secret between the three of us. I told you so when you came.’

The slow words added one to one.

‘That’s what the School is for,’ he continued. ‘It’s a refuge for the uncommitted. I’ve given my life for that.’

He fell back into silence.

‘Then who could have told Bosenwite about us?’ Roger said. ‘Who else could have found out?’

For a long time the professor said nothing. Roger peered forward in the gloom. The yellowy eyelids had dropped down over the tired eyes. Roger listened carefully to the sick man’s irregular breathing.

He glanced into the dark corner where the nun was sitting. A slight movement as her fingers busily passed the beads of her rosary through her folded hands.

‘I’m sorry to be so long,’ the tired, tired voice came at last. ‘But I find it hard to gather my thoughts nowadays. I’m afraid at times I simply lie here rambling incoherently. However, with time and patience I can still put things together when the need arises. I still have certain reserves.’

Roger leant farther forward. The rich voice was very weak.

‘There are two possibilities as I see it,’ O Nuallain went on. ‘My secretaries have access to my files. Generally they do not see the confidential one. But since I have been stuck in bed up here they have on occasion had to bring me papers from it.’

‘That would be Miss Hogan and that newish girl Miss Whatshername, Miss Bloom?’ said Roger.

‘Yes, that is correct. They have each been up to me here with documents from that file. Of course, Miss Hogan has been with us ever since we began. I have never had the

least reason to suspect her integrity. Miss Bloom has only been with us a couple of years, since Fergus Pike left to go to the Ministry of External Affairs. But she comes from an old Dublin family. I suppose I've known her since she was a slip of a girl. It's not possible.'

Silence again in the big gloomy bedroom with its pervasive smell of disinfectant.

After a while Roger said:

'I had thought of the possibilities of your secretaries having access to some file or other. But you mentioned a second approach.'

O Nuallain's voice seemed a little stronger in the fast-gathering darkness.

'Yes. You said that it was sometime in the summer that this man Bosenwite learnt that Eric was here.'

'Yes, Bosenwite came over to receive the Sir Patrick Dun Medal. Eric shouted insults at him in the Theatre at Trinity.'

'That was the first inkling Bosenwite had about you?'

'Yes. You're thinking that anyone who has joined the School since then is suspect?'

'There are really only two. Colonel Myles and Austin Boycott. I expect you know Myles. He has been studying Oliver Cromwell since he retired from the British Army about ten years ago. He published some excellent stuff and when he came over here recently we gave him a grant.'

The quiet voice died away. The sound of the wind in the shrubbery of the big suburban house in Rathmines.

'A charming man,' the rich voice added, 'a soldier of the old school and a scholar. The only person to join us in the past half year - except old Boycott.'

'I don't know him,' Roger said.

'I'm surprised. He's well known in Dublin. But then you've been a bit of a hermit, haven't you?'

‘I’m afraid I have.’

‘No matter. Well now, let me see what I can tell you about Boycott.’

The nun rose quietly from her chair, went over to the table of medicine bottles and switched a lamp on. The bulb under the thick green metal shade was of very low power but its faint light obliterated the last traces of daylight in the big room. The nun pulled the heavy green chenille curtains firmly together.

The turf in the basket grate gave out a glow almost as powerful as the dim light on the table.

‘Boycott is a Communist, of course,’ O Nuallain said.

Roger jumped.

‘And he’s allowed to work at the School?’

‘Oh yes. Why not? I insist on the Government giving me a free hand in my choice of staff. Although Boycott’s not exactly what you might call a card-carrying party member. He wouldn’t take orders from the party if he happened to object to them.’

‘But all the same,’ Roger said, ‘in this country, in this day and age.’

‘He threatened to blow up the Dail a couple of years back,’ said O Nuallain.

Roger detected in the faint light a twitch of the sunken cheeks that might have been a smile.

‘I don’t understand,’ he said.

‘Go and meet Austin Boycott, then you will,’ O Nuallain replied. ‘You’ll understand why he’s working at the School – he’s writing a book on the Boycott System, he’s descended from the notorious Charles Boycott himself, ironically enough – and you’ll understand why he could not possibly be your man.’

On the bosomy purple eiderdown the outstretched fleshless hand drooped.

‘There’s one other person,’ Roger said. ‘A man called Wyndham, George Wyndham. I gather he’s got some sort of permission to work in the School library.’

‘Oh, yes, I’d quite forgotten about him. I met him just before I retired to bed for the last time –’

Roger made a gesture of protest.

‘Oh come, I know quite well it’s the last time. It doesn’t worry me. A few years ago when the book on the Absolute Differential Calculus was all to write I might have been fretful. But it’s done now. *Nunc dimittis*, you know.’

The peace of the big bedroom. The threshing of the wind in the shrubbery down below. The hot atmosphere with its ineradicable sickroom tang.

‘I hope to hell George Wyndham is your man,’ O Nuallain said. ‘He’s the most terrible bore I ever met.’

Roger, peering hard at the sick man, thought he heard the nun in the corner rustle with disapproval.

‘No, I don’t hope that,’ O Nuallain said. ‘I hope nobody is your man. But I suppose there must be someone.’

The eyelids closed.

Roger got up to leave.

‘Good-bye, sir,’ he said.

The nun rose from her narrow chair and went to open the door for him.

He began to go.

Then suddenly he stopped. He eyed the black cowed figure with the unlikely stage-Irish accent and turned back to the great bed. He leant close to the sick man.

‘Professor O Nuallain,’ he whispered, ‘there’s one thing more. It’s important.’

Beneath him the eyelids opened.

‘Professor, you said you sometimes were incoherent and delirious. The nurse, the nun. Who is she?’

Chapter Eight

Suddenly the yellow oval of Professor O Nuallain's face lying wanly on the great mound of smooth white pillows began to shake.

For a moment it looked as if he was entering on an agony of coughing. Then it became apparent that he was laughing. Laughing tumultuously.

The enigmatic black figure of the nun closed the door with a sharp click and whisked over to the bed.

'Now, Professor,' she said, 'you musn't be doing that. Sure, you know what dear Dr O'Malley said.'

She turned the black coif in Roger's direction and he caught a swift reproving glance from somewhere inside it.

'Ah, don't be a bloody fool, now,' Professor O Nuallain said. 'A laugh like that does me more good than all O'Malley's palliatives.'

The nun went back to the door and opened it again with severity.

Roger stood up to go.

'One moment,' O Nuallain said.

Roger bent over him again. The fleshless face, the colourless lips.

But a spark in the deep-sunk eyes.

'I'll tell you,' the old man said, 'Sister Bridget left her home in County Kerry when she was fifteen to go into a convent nearby and she's been there ever since. She came up to Dublin specially to nurse me, and it's her first visit to the paganish place.'

Roger approached the School buildings circumspectly. At the entrance to the square he stood for a long time behind a tree making a methodical survey of every possible point from which the Bosun or one of his hirelings could be watching the door of the School.

It was always possible that the Bosun had rented a room overlooking the School. There were occasionally vacant offices in the tall houses round the square. It was possible too that he had been busy during the afternoon recruiting someone less conspicuous than the docker. But there was nothing Roger could do about either of these possibilities. Some risks had to be taken. He looked at his watch.

Five o'clock. In half an hour or less the School would be closing.

He left the shadow of the tree and, turning up his collar and hunching his shoulders, he walked away from the square, round two corners and back to the nearest point to the modest flight of steps that led up to the School front door.

A last look round.

Then he set off, walking quickly but not too quickly. He kept his eyes fixed straight ahead until he got level with the steps and then he turned sharply at right angles and swiftly ran up them. The door as usual was not locked and he pushed it quickly open and stepped into the hallway, bare and unwelcoming beneath its fine plasterwork ceiling.

He stood still for a moment regaining his breath. Then he walked over to the big polished wood door with the neat painted board on it saying 'Inquiries' with underneath the official times of opening and closing in Irish and English.

He pushed the door open.

In the spaciouly proportioned room, with its four tall windows, its plaster panelled walls and its high fireplace between the two elegant pillars, the office furniture

provided by some Ministry or other looked curiously squat. It gave the effect of a room designed for ordinary human beings having been taken over by dwarfs or apes. Round the walls were a number of green painted steel filing cabinets, their tops about a foot below the level of the mantelshelf. On either side of the door were two impermanent looking desks set facing each other. Each bore a triangular wooden bar painted with the name of its possessor once in Roman script, once in Gaelic. On the left Miss Kathleen Hogan. On the right, Miss Etain Bloom.

Miss Hogan's desk was unoccupied. But when Roger entered Miss Bloom looked up at him from hers with a bright smile of inquiry.

Roger looked at her. The secretary machine, the dispenser of stationery and official returns, transformed into somebody. Somebody to be entered into a relationship with, to be talked to. About the Infiltrator. Possibly, for all Professor O Nuallain's disbelief, the Infiltrator herself.

The chances after all were no more than five to one. There were five people likely to have told the Bosun what he wanted to know: two secretaries with access to the files and three newcomers who might have been sent to the School with instructions to pry. A total of five, and this girl with the polite smile one of the five.

She must be about thirty. Her blonde hair was swept into a bold chignon but various wisps had escaped and trailed over the velvety white skin of her neck. She wore glasses, an elongated blue butterfly pair. It was difficult to see the colour of her eyes through them, but they did not conceal the wide bridge of her nose. Her cheeks were rounded, full and pale. She used a bright red lipstick and her mouth was moderately large.

'Can I help you?' she asked.

She had had to wear the polite smile for rather a long time.

Roger started.

'Yes,' he said. 'Yes. That is, is Miss Hogan here?'

Etain Bloom looked across to the empty desk opposite hers.

'She left early,' she said. 'She had to order some stationery.'

'Well, it doesn't matter. No doubt you can tell me what I want to know.'

'Yes?'

'It's about Eric Smith. I was wondering if he'd left any papers that I ought to look into.'

'No, that's quite all right,' she answered. 'All his papers have gone up to Professor O Nuallain's. He sent a special request for them. In fact he was in so much of a hurry I thought it was rather like speeding the parting plough.'

'Everything went up?' Roger asked.

'Absolutely everything. I did it myself. I went along to his lab and had a thoroughly good turn-out. Every scrap of paper there was went up to Palmerston Gardens.'

Roger hesitated. He bit his lower lip.

'Did you go over it before you sent it off?' he asked.

She glanced up at him. A faintly puzzled frown.

'Do you know what the professor's instructions were?' she said.

'No, it's the first I've heard of them.'

'Oh, well then, I'd better not say any more. It's no good allowing even the least bit of lassitude to creep into a business like this.'

'Like what?'

'I'm afraid I can't say. Look, I know you were a friend of Eric's and all that, but I simply can't say a word.'

'That's all right. There's nothing to get worked up about. It was just a passing thought. I suddenly wondered if any of

his results might be lying about unpublished.'

'Well, I can't tell you. I couldn't, actually, even if I wanted to. But please don't press me.'

'Certainly not,' Roger said.

She looked faintly flushed.

'As a matter of fact,' Roger went on, 'Professor O Nuallain was mentioning your name only this afternoon. I've just been up to see him. He said he had known you since you were a schoolgirl.'

She blushed.

'How is he?' she asked eagerly. 'The poor old pet, I feel terribly sorry for him. I remember him giving me sweets when he came to see Daddy. And then he was awfully decent about getting me this job. I mean I only just scraped through college and my shorthand's pretty appalling.'

'He's very ill, of course,' Roger said.

For fear of saying more. Something not to be put into words. Because in words it would be too clearly seen. The death of a hero. The loss. The bereft disciple. The blankness.

Etain Bloom was looking up at him again. Eyes, behind the ridiculously gay butterfly spectacles, wide.

'You mean he's dying, don't you?' she said.

'Yes.'

They were both silent.

'He knows,' said Roger after a while. 'He told me he was quite ready to go.'

Again a silence.

'Of course, he was too weak to talk much,' Roger said quickly. 'That was why he didn't mention Eric's papers to me, I expect. What was it he said about them?'

A plunge.

He could see her back and shoulders straightening under the pale blue woollen frock.

'I'm afraid I can't possibly say. I've been told not to mention them at all, no matter under what pretence they were asked about.'

'I'm sorry. I didn't mean to over-persuade you. I - er. Well, I suppose it's about time I was pushing off.'

Checkmate.

Roger turned and walked out of the office, through the bare hallway, out of the front door and down the steps into the square. Deep in dejected thought.

The big black car drawing up quietly alongside him. The docker sliding out on to the pavement. Roger being bundled into the car like a piece of cargo discharged on piece-rates.

The docker scrambled in after him and the car shot off at speed.

'You know, my dear fellow,' said the Bosun, raising his piping voice above the noise of the engine, 'you simply aren't up to it. You're hopeless, perfectly hopeless.'

Roger glowered.

'As soon as we get to my new little home,' the Bosun went on, 'I'm going to give myself the pleasure of having you held down and getting that deplorable bit of moustache shaved off. And what about the hair dye? Does it wash away?'

'I shan't hesitate to bring an action for assault,' Roger said.

The Bosun gave a short giggle.

'The situation will not arise,' he said.

'What makes you think that, I should like to know.'

'Such aggression. And you used to be so persistently mild. It was one of the things I liked about you.'

The car stopped at some traffic lights. Roger suddenly dived towards the door handle. The Bosun was too fat to do much to prevent him, but the docker leant forward and

wrapped an iron arm round his chest to prevent him. Roger wriggled hard. A muscle in his side protested. He got the handle of the door fully down, but the docker was holding him too tightly for him to be able to move the door itself.

‘You had better stop it,’ the Bosun piped.

Roger found that his disengaged arm came near the point where the Bosun’s trouser button was undone. He gave himself the satisfaction of digging in hard with his elbow.

The slight shift in position caused by this side skirmish brought Roger’s weight slightly against the car door. Slowly it began to swing open.

‘Drive on, drive on,’ the Bosun shouted.

The little man with a round jet black head sitting at the wheel let in the clutch without a word. The lights were still against them, but no traffic was coming on the cross road.

The car shot forward. As they were about half way across there was a heavy squealing of brakes as a cattle lorry coming up fast at right angles to them was forced to a sudden halt. A volley of hooting followed them as they headed away from the intersection with swiftly gathering speed.

‘You’re lucky there were no Guards about,’ Roger said.

He flopped back in his seat. The docker still kept an arm pinioning him. The Bosun leant forward and pulled the swinging door to.

‘Guards,’ he said petulantly. ‘Why can’t they call them policemen?’

‘Sure, there won’t be trouble with the Guards now?’ the docker said.

An unexpected voice. An unexpected point of view.

‘Well,’ said Roger sharply, ‘you can’t go shooting lights like that and expect to get away with it every time. Let alone grabbing hold of peaceful citizens and pushing them into cars against their will.’

'Ah, sure, that was only a kind of joke like,' the docker said.

He seemed happier.

'Of course it was,' the Bosun said.

He gave the docker a malevolent glare.

The docker hung his head.

By now the car was at the edge of the city, heading fast along the good road to Bray. Roger looked out of the window. Across the sweep of Dublin Bay the lights were twinkling in the black darkness on the Hill of Howth.

The docker kept his arm resting lightly on Roger's lap. The man with the black slicked down hair in the driver's seat stared straight ahead at the broad road reeling out in front of him. He drove with concentration and skill as fast as the car would let him.

A shower of rain hit them and the car seemed to lurch for an instant. But it was only the black-haired driver slowing down by a few miles an hour to accustom himself to the different conditions.

Roger twisted a little further round. The lights of Dublin were fading away.

'Yes, that's the last you'll see of Blackpool,' the Bosun said. 'I prefer to call it Blackpool, you know, the literal translation of the Irish Dubh Linn, or dark pool.'

'The Irish name is Baile atha Cliath. It means the town of the hurdle ford.'

'I believe there is a move to call it that. But I prefer Blackpool. It puts the place in its proper provincial rank.'

'It's where I choose to live,' Roger said. 'And you won't find it so easy to get me away from it and over to Leeds against my will.'

'Against your will,' echoed the Bosun.

He giggled again.

A good joke.

Roger looked at the pink balloon face floating in front of him oddly illuminated by the flash of the road lights.

A feeling of disquiet. Something in store.

And without warning the smoothly purring engine stopped.

'Hell,' said the driver.

It was the first word Roger had heard him speak.

He steered the powerless vehicle to the edge of the road and pulled on the brake.

The docker's iron band of an arm tightened across Roger's chest.

'What the devil is happening?' said the Bosun.

The driver got out without a word. Bending his head down against the spears of cold rain he went round to the front and lifted up the bonnet. He was a very small man, Roger could see now that he was standing up. His face under the jet black oiled hair was dead white. He walked with bow legs. He might have been a stable lad with a prison pallor.

They sat in silence in the stranded car. The Bosun staring angrily at the hood of the bonnet sticking up in front of the windscreen like the conning tower of a submarine. The docker looking at Roger. Roger looking from side to side.

And seeing no way of escape.

A car swished by them going fast. Roger watched its red rear lights go round the bend just ahead of them and quickly disappear.

'What the hell is going on?' the Bosun asked.

He made no attempt to get out of the warmth of the car to go and see. The stable lad-chauffeur remained hidden behind the bonnet hood.

The sharp tapping on the nearside window beside the docker made all three of them jump. In the darkness it was

just possible to make out the pale shape of a face through the trickles of rain on the glass.

‘Go away,’ said the Bosun. ‘We’re quite all right. We don’t need any help. Go off.’

The figure evidently was unable to hear through the tightly closed window. They – it was impossible even to tell whether it was man, woman, or boy – continued to tap at the glass.

The Bosun leant forward across Roger and gestured violently. But the tapping continued.

‘Open the window a bit and make them sheer off,’ the Bosun said to the docker. ‘Speak to them in a voice they’ll understand. What the hell does Collins think he’s doing?’

The docker turned and wound the window down a couple of inches. Before he had a chance to say anything the face on the outside bounced up to the narrow gap. It belonged to an old woman with her head wrapped in a blanket shawl.

‘If yez wants to get back to Dublin,’ she cackled, ‘there’s a bus coming just this minute. I’m after waiting for it meself.’

‘Yes,’ said Roger loudly, ‘I do.’

He slipped out of the docker’s grasp quite easily. In turning to deal with the window his grip had considerably slackened. Plainly he was a one-thing-at-a-time man.

In a flash Roger had got the door open on the Bosun’s side, had pushed past the inflated bulk and stepped into the coldness of the rain.

As he did so the lights of the Dublin bus swept round the corner ahead of them. Roger heard the little old woman scuttering across the road beside him, murmuring a cross between a prayer and a series of oaths. He ran forward as the brightly lit bus came to a stop.

The old woman scampered into it as if the whole incident had been specially contrived by the devil to prevent her

getting into Dublin that night. Roger swung himself on to the platform at her heels. The conductor peered briefly into the darkness and sharply rang his bell. The big bus pulled away from the stop.

Roger looked behind. The Bosun had got out of the warmth of the car at last. He was standing looking towards the bus. With intent.

For the whole of the journey back into Dublin Roger kept a sharp eye out of the back window of the bus. If the squat stable lad, Collins, could get the car's engine going again it would not take them long to overtake the lumbering bus. Roger looked at the few bedraggled passengers staring glumly ahead at the lights of the city. They looked as if their reactions to a kidnapping would be almost non-existent. Perhaps afterwards they might refer to it. With caution.

But the bus completed its journey without disturbing melodrama. Roger stayed on it until it pulled into its terminus just at the south side of O'Connell Bridge. It was still raining when he clambered off. He turned up his coat collar and started to walk towards the bridge and the comfort of his flat.

A familiar face caught his eye. He looked again. Standing waiting for another bus was Etain Bloom.

Roger buried himself further into his coat and began to walk by as if he had failed to see her.

Suddenly he stopped. For a moment or two he stood still on the pavement with the cold rain beating on his head. Then he made up his mind.

Etain still had not seen him. He looked at her speculatively. She was wearing a mackintosh with a hood but a wisp or two of the blonde hair protruded and clung damply to her face. She had taken off the butterfly spectacles and was blinking shortsightedly at the numbers of the buses as they approached the stop.

The attempt at direct questioning had been a decided failure.

A bus moved up and Etain moved forward to board it.

Roger shook the rain off his hair, held his head higher and moved in behind her.

Chapter Nine

When Etain Bloom eventually got to the head of the queue and pulled herself up into the dripping wet bus she went up the stairs to the upper deck. There were seven people between her and Roger. At the moment Etain got on the conductor began counting out aloud as each person set foot on the platform.

Roger lifted his head and strained to hear, but the conductor was simply counting without shouting out how many places he reckoned he had on the bus.

Four, five, six.

The conductor raised his arm. Down comes the chopper to chop off ...

What? A chance to open up a path that had appeared to be barred, possibly the path to the Infiltrator.

'Full right up.'

The conductor's arm swept down in front of Roger.

'I say, couldn't you take just one more,' Roger said. 'It's very important.'

The conductor looked at him malevolently.

A desiccated man of forty-five with uncompromising spectacles set close to his eyes, giving nothing away.

'Sure, it's important for everyone to be getting home on a night like this,' he snapped.

He raised his arm to ring the bell.

A chorus of voices from the upper deck.

'More room here.'

'Seats up here, conductor.'

'More room, more room.'

‘Ah, sure, why tell him? Do yez want to wait all night?’

This last voice seemed to decide the conductor. He glared at Roger and darted up a few of the steps to peer into the upper deck.

An irate crab.

He bounced down again, placed himself dramatically guarding the passengers on the lower deck from any violation of their privacy, and with a curt jerk of his head indicated to Roger that he could go up.

He shot forward like an animal released from a trap.

At the top of the stairs he found that there were five or six vacant seats on the top deck of the bus. One of them was next to Etain. He paused a moment and looked at her hooded figure staring damply out of the steamed up window beside her. Someone from behind pushed up against him. He stumbled forward along the narrow aisle, forcing his way past the clammy bulging wet shoulders on either side.

He sat down beside Etain.

She moved a little nearer the window and continued to peer out into the rain-splashed darkness without looking round.

For a minute he sat waiting. Then he took a deep breath.

‘Why, Miss Bloom,’ he said. ‘What a surprise.’

She turned.

‘Mr Farrar,’ she said. ‘I didn’t know you came out this way.’

Roger licked his top lip.

‘Look,’ he said, ‘you ought to call me by my Christian name, Roger.’

She blinked at him and scrabbled in her large handbag.

‘I – I don’t exactly come out this way,’ he said.

She produced the butterfly spectacles from her bag and put them on.

‘This rain is terrible,’ she said.

She shook her head. Now that she had the spectacles on she seemed to be seeing him more clearly, taking him in.

‘How far are you going then, Roger?’ she said.

He looked blank.

She smiled.

‘Honest to God,’ she said, ‘you look as if you don’t know.’

‘I don’t.’

His mind racing.

‘That is I – I’m going all the way.’

‘Right out to Howth on a night like this?’ she said.

‘Howth,’ said Roger.

‘You sound as if you didn’t know this was a Howth bus.’

‘Oh well, yes, of course I did. I must have done, mustn’t I? I mean I wouldn’t get on a bus not knowing where it was going to, would I?’

‘To tell you the truth, you look as if you would, you do really.’

‘Do I?’

Roger found no more to say.

The bus sloshed through the rain. Steam rose up from the coats of the passengers. It became impossible to see anything through the windows.

‘Er – how far do you go, Etain?’ Roger said. ‘Do you live out this way?’

‘Well not really,’ she replied. ‘My parents have a house on the south side. That’s my home, I suppose you might say. But I managed to persuade them to let me have a flat and I found this place out this way. It’s just on the edge of the city, in a big old Protestant rectory that’s been divided up a bit. It’s by no means what you might call shipshape and country fashion, but I like it.’

‘Oh yes, it must be nice.’

‘It’s terribly cold actually, but at least I’m not right under the parents’ wing all the time.’

‘But in summer it must be nice.’

‘Yes. Yes, it is.’

End of conversation.

Another prolonged silence. The bus stopping and starting, sending the big flat puddles swooshing out, crawling onwards.

‘Um, do you know Austin Boycott?’ Roger asked.

‘Well, I do,’ she said.

Sudden caution.

‘He works at the School,’ Etain added. ‘Why wouldn’t I know him?’

‘No reason, no reason at all. I just heard somebody mention him the other day. I’ve seen him around the School. I know him by sight, but I’m not sure I realized he was working full time at the School.’

Roger leant forward.

‘Well, he is.’

Etain turned and looked at the steam on the window. She rubbed at it with the inner part of her mackintosh sleeve.

Suddenly she turned round.

‘I wish to God he wasn’t at the School,’ she said. ‘Honest to God, he frightens me.’

‘Frightens you?’

‘Yes, you must know the way he goes on.’

‘No. No, I don’t. I haven’t met him. I just know vaguely what he looks like.’

‘I thought everyone knew about him. No one else seems to take any notice. They all say it’s only coddling. But, I tell you, I don’t like it.’

‘Don’t like what?’

‘All this class of talk about liquidating the opposition, sweeping away the bourgeoisie, forced labour camps in the Curragh and everything.’

‘I haven’t heard any of this.’

‘Well, you can’t have met him then, because he’s always doing it. And he sounds so nasty the way he boasts of the need to be ready to betray anyone who deviates from the party line, and says he’d have his friends shot without the least hesitation. I can’t think why they don’t arrest him or something.’

‘But didn’t you say everybody thinks he doesn’t mean it all?’

‘That’s what they keep telling me, Mammy and Daddy and everybody. But I still get the creeps whenever he comes near me.’

Again she turned to the window. Long trickles were running down from the patch she had cleaned with her mackintosh sleeve. The bus lurched to a stop again.

‘Does he ever ask you questions about the School?’ Roger said.

‘Oh, I wouldn’t let him.’

She spoke without turning away from the window. Roger peered over her shoulder at the clear patch on the misted window. All that could be seen outside was the gleams of passing lights elongated on the shiny wet surface of the road.

‘Is it far to where you live?’ he asked.

‘Quite a way still,’ she answered.

They lapsed into silence. A promising line suddenly gone to earth.

Roger felt a wave of irritation and began to wonder how frequent the return service of buses was.

Etain turned towards him. The damp hair that had been clinging to the sides of her cheeks was beginning to dry out and fluff up.

‘It is you who’s got that terrific dog, isn’t it?’ she said. ‘I mean he must be very nice, but he is enormous.’

‘He’s a wolfhound,’ Roger said. ‘A damn silly sort of dog to keep in the middle of a city actually, but I looked after him for someone when I first came over here, and then I sort of took him on.’

‘What’s his name?’

The random question.

‘Cuchulain.’

Etain at first found nothing to say to this. Roger turned and looked down at the steam rising from his sodden shoes. Etain looked as if she too was going to try another spell of contemplating the rainy night, but suddenly she spoke.

‘Cuchulain,’ she burst out. ‘It’s awful, you know, but I don’t really know which of them he was. Daddy and Mammy are awfully keen on Irish legends and all that – that’s why I’m called Etain, actually – but I can never sort out one from the other. Was Cuchulain the old king who took Deirdre off?’

‘No, that was Conchubar, I’m afraid. Cuchulain was actually his nephew. He defended Ulster single-handed against Queen Maeve. He’s the one the statue in the Post Office is of.’

‘Oh, of course. You must think I’m awful not to know. Did you call your Cuchulain that yourself or was he already named when you got him?’

‘Oh, he was named indeed. But not Cuchulain. He was called Snibbo. I thought it was a bit much.’

‘I should say so. It would be terrible for a lovely creature like that to descend down to being called Snibbo. Did you choose Cuchulain because he symbolizes Ireland? If I mean symbolizes.’

'You do, and I didn't really. It was a line from Yeats that was in my mind. The one that says Cuchulain "fought with the invulnerable tide". I rather liked it, so I saddled the poor beast with the name.'

'Well,' Etain said, 'I shall always be able to remember which Cuchulain is now. That's some progression anyway.'

She sat savouring her achievement. Roger was at a loss for an appropriate comment.

The rain beat steadily on the metal roof of the bus above them. After a while Roger spoke again.

'Tell me,' he said, 'will Miss Hogan be in the office tomorrow?'

'She will. On the dot of nine.'

'You sound bitter. Does she beat you to it then?'

'Ah well, for God's sake, why get in at the exact minute when no one else so much as shows their face till half past and there's nothing to do that can't be done in ten minutes or five?'

'You do sound bitter.'

'Oh, I suppose she's all right really. But she's been at the School since Adam and Eve and she thinks she knows everything.'

'Adam and Eve isn't really so long, you know. The School's only been in existence since Ireland caught on to all the university refugees who only asked to get on with their work in quiet.'

'Now don't you start. I'm always getting the history of the School from her.'

'I'm sorry. It's just that I'm rather in favour.'

'Well, why wouldn't you be? I suppose you must be some sort of a refugee yourself? Although not everybody at the School is.'

'Why should you think that I'm a refugee?'

The sharp question.

‘Oh now, don’t take off so. I only supposed that you were because no one would come and work over here if they could work in England.’

‘Oh, wouldn’t they just. England’s no paradise, you know.’

‘Maybe not. But all the same I’d be off there tomorrow if I could persuade my parents to let me go.’

Roger smiled.

‘You’re over twenty-one, aren’t you?’

‘I’m twenty-seven. And I suppose I could go if I wanted to. But they’d be on tenterhooks worrying was I sleeping with a man or something, so I don’t go.’

‘But what exactly is it about life over there that attracts you?’

‘It’s what there is to do. You haven’t lived in Dublin all your life: you don’t know what a little fishpot it can get to seem.’

‘Oh, I can’t agree. It just seems to me that you’ve got to take a different attitude in Dublin. You have to learn to stop feeling you’ve some sort of right to the best of everything – to the best actors in the best plays, to a completely representative sample of the world’s art, to the greatest orchestras in the world playing steadily through –’

‘Oh, but that would be marvellous,’ Etain interrupted. ‘Just think of what music we get here in Dublin, and then think of all you can hear in London.’

‘So you like music, do you? I didn’t know that.’

She smiled at him.

‘And how would you,’ she said, ‘when you haven’t said more than two words to me before this evening?’

Roger smiled back.

‘I’m afraid I’ve got rather into the habit of regarding Cuchulain as quite enough company,’ he said. ‘But I do shut

him up sometimes and go to a concert, you know.'

'A Dublin concert.'

'All right, perhaps it's not completely brilliant. Perhaps one doesn't hear exactly what one would choose to hear, perhaps one might prefer a Handel opera to the usual -'

'Handel, do you like Handel?'

'Of course I do. But don't tell me that you do. You're too young.'

'I like that. And is the absolutely greatest music in the world to be reserved solely for - for -'

She stumbled for the word.

'Ears of discretion,' Roger suggested.

'Anyhow, it's a monstrous idea. I bet I know more about Handel's music than you do, however old you are.'

'I'm not a hundred, you know. But have you really made a study of Handel then?'

'Well, not what you'd call a study, I expect. I expect you have terrific standards of scholarship and all that. But I've read all the books I could find on him, and I'm gradually collecting all the records there are. Only I've always had such a rotten gramophone.'

'But, tell me, why Handel? Why should you have developed this passion for Handel?'

'Oh, I don't know. For one thing I'm the only one in the family who's at all musical and when I was a kid I came across a whole heap of music that used to belong to my old Great aunt Molly, who had been a bit of a singer in her day, And there was a lot of Handel in that. And then when I discovered that the Messiah had first been performed in Dublin, I just went a burton on him.'

'Well, at least you can still hear the Messiah performed over here.'

‘That’s exactly what I mean. The Messiah, the Water Music and precious little else. Think of all – Oh, save us, this is my stop.’

She got hastily to her feet, grabbing at the big handbag.

Roger stood up to let her go past.

He could find nothing to say.

‘Well, good night,’ she said. ‘It was queer meeting you.’

‘Yes. Yes, it was. I – I’ll –’

He followed her along the swaying bus. The brakes shrieked with the wet as it pulled up at the stop. Etain hurried down the stairs.

‘Look,’ Roger called down after her, ‘I’d love to hear your records some time.’

She turned round as she peered into the darkness before stepping off on to the roadway.

‘You would?’ she said.

‘I certainly would.’

‘All right then. That’s a date.’

The desiccated conductor banged hard at the bell. The bus eased forward into the night. The pale shape of Etain’s mackintosh was swallowed up by the wet darkness.

Roger decided next morning that he would take his time and walk to the School. He had had enough of buses the evening before and it was pleasant to be able to go about the city on foot after all the rain.

Besides there were things he still had to make up his mind about.

After he had crossed O’Connell Bridge he felt strongly reluctant to complete his journey. Perhaps somewhere near the School the Bosun and his men were lurking.

How long would they keep it up?

He turned right and walked slowly along the quays. Across the cold and sluggish green of the Liffey the dome of the Four Courts rose against a pale blue washed out sky.

A similarity of lassitude. The Pathetic Fallacy.

He stopped abruptly.

Outside one of the booksellers' shops standing peering down at a tray of battered anonymous second-hand volumes was a figure he recognized.

A shock of white hair unprotected by any hat and underneath it a bright red face almost in the shape of a T, with the broad shallow brow tapering quickly down to a narrow nutcracker jaw. Beneath this light thin head a thin wiry body wrapped in a dull green overcoat faded to a varying olive.

Austin Boycott.

Roger stood for a while watching him.

The wispy figure industriously turning over the worn-out volumes in the box. A book beetle searching for tasty morsels.

Roger crossed the road.

'It's Mr Boycott, isn't it?' he said.

The elderly man turned round sharply.

Roger looked into a pair of blue eyes as washed out as the pale sky over the Four Courts dome. An apple-sweet smile.

'Yes, but I don't think I've had the pleasure ...'

The voice was deep and melodious. Cadenced.

'My name's Farrar, Roger Farrar. I'm actually a colleague of yours at the School of Further Studies, though I don't think we've ever been formally introduced. I was playing truant myself and taking a stroll along the quays when I happened to see you and thought I ought to make myself

known to a fellow fugitive from duty. We could invent an alibi.'

Austin Boycott chuckled.

'I'm glad to find someone in that pernicious institution with enough guts to absent himself even for half a morning,' he said. 'Such a crowd of timid, lacklustre, crawling sycophants it has never before been my painful task to associate with.'

'Oh, there isn't all that much to rebel against,' Roger said. 'I believe there were some terrible scenes though some time ago when it was proposed to increase the number of statutory public lectures by two a year.'

'Nothing to rebel against?'

Austin Boycott's sonorous boom rolled out across the sluggish pea-green waters of the Liffey. A miserable looking swan shot forward abruptly on the mirrored surface.

'A sink of conformism, a pillar of establishment hypocrisy, and you talk about having nothing to rebel against. The whole place should be burnt to the ground, to the ground. The staff should be publicly hanged and the secretaries raped.'

'No wonder one of them was saying to me only last night that she was mortally afraid of you,' Roger said.

'Afraid?'

The pale blue eyes beneath the wide forehead blinked in incomprehension.

'But who is this? Why should she be afraid of me? What have people been telling her about me?'

The red eyelids blinking, blotting out the faintly blue wide eyes.

Roger grinned.

'As far as I can gather,' he said, 'they've been telling her that all your political opinions were what they call a cod.'

Austin Boycott clenched his gnarled fist.

‘A cod, is it?’ he said. ‘That’s the way the establishment always has tried to deal with opinions that were personally unpalatable to it. I’ll give them cod. Wait till the day comes. A bullet in their belly will show them whether I’m coddling or not.’

‘Oh come,’ Roger said, ‘surely the establishment’s not quite as bad as that.’

‘It is, it is,’ the elderly little nut of a man boomed. ‘I’ll tell you a very remarkable thing, sir.’

‘Yes?’

‘I hate the establishment. I’ve worked all my life to secure its overthrow. And yet all my life I’ve been unable, totally and utterly unable, to shake myself free of its coils. I happened to be very vividly reminded of that fact only some twenty minutes ago.’

The pale blue eyes burnt to one half shade darker as they gazed with passionate fury up at Roger.

‘What is the very cradle and nursery of the establishment in these islands, Mr Farrar?’ he asked.

Roger pondered a moment.

‘Mother of Parliaments, system of justice,’ he hazarded.

‘No, no, no.’

Booming scorn.

‘I’ll tell you what is the very fountainhead of the establishment, the very root of the whole putrid structure.’

A dramatic pause. The last reverberations dying away in the still air over the faintly smelly river.

‘The prep school,’ said Austin Boycott. ‘The British preparatory school. And do you know ...’

The boom rising to new depths.

‘... do you know for seven years I taught in one such institution. Seven years. I was reminded of it after thinking I

had thrust it into total oblivion by seeing only this morning one of my pupils. I recognized him, even after an interval of over forty years. The physical traits were unmistakable - immense corpulence, a port-wine complexion, and pale gold hair.'

Chapter Ten

Austin Boycott jerked up his little T-shaped head under the spikes of white hair and looked at Roger.

Some reaction required. Roger was very slow.

'A pupil of yours?'

The most he could manage.

Boycott accepted it.

'I remember him well,' he boomed on happily. 'A vicious child. Even in that nursery for infant power complexes he stood out as an incipient megalomaniac. He was the admired gang leader, the boy the others delighted to obey. Yet he was physically incompetent to a degree and he possessed not one of the attributes which are generally supposed to appeal to the juvenile mind. And didn't he just delight in the others' obedience. Of course, you can imagine what became of him, the great windy balloon.'

Roger refused to admit the possibility of coincidence.

'He sounds the sort of boy who would end up in prison,' he said.

A shout against the wind.

'Prison?'

Boycott's laugh rolling like miniature thunder along the quays and toppling at last into the chill Liffey water.

'My good man, that sort of person doesn't end up in prison: he ends up at the top. And that's just where my pet pupil has ended. I might have guessed it.'

'A financier then?'

Roger persisting.

‘Oh, no. Nearer the kernel of power than that class of jackal.’

‘I’ve a feeling I know who you mean.’

Roger trying a new way of turning the luck.

‘Have you? Do you know the fellow? William Bosenwite? Head of an English Government scientific place up to heaven knows what pernicious twaddle?’

‘Yes, I know him.’

It could have been no one else.

‘You do, do you?’

‘Well, that’s to say I know who he is – vaguely. I’ve seen him about.’

‘Then you appreciate my point. He is what we are fighting against. He represents the entrenched evil of the whole establishment.’

The faint, faint blue eyes looking up at Roger under the spiky crown of pure white hair.

An assessment. Observation after experiment?

‘Is this the first time you’ve come across Bosenwite since you taught him as a boy forty years ago?’ Roger asked.

A necessary question.

‘The first time?’

Austin Boycott seemed to hesitate. A faint frown appeared across the broad but shallow brow.

‘No, not really,’ he went on. ‘I’ve followed his progress, you know. I marked him down all those years ago. A prime example. I’ve watched him.’

‘He was over in Dublin this summer,’ Roger said. ‘I happened to see him somewhere or other. Did you meet him again then?’

The pallid blue eyes innocently wide.

‘I’ve not the least idea,’ Austin Boycott boomed. ‘He tries to avoid me, you know. I must be like a conscience to him –

an essential item of mental equipment he has hitherto managed to do without.'

'He avoids you, does he?'

'Oh, certainly. I tell you what I think he is utterly afraid of: being caught in my company. He's afraid of what I might say to the third party.'

'Is he indeed?'

Roger looked out across the sluggish Liffey.

'Well now,' he said, 'are you going to submit to the conformist yoke again at the School? If you are I'll give myself the pleasure of accompanying you.'

Austin Boycott glanced again at the tray of tattered books. The outdated urgency of their titles.

He smiled up at Roger with singular sweetness.

'All right,' he said, 'I'll go along with you, if you don't mind walking. I avoid public transport as much as possible. I find the open expression of radical opinions is apt to cause resentment in this benighted country of ours.'

They walked side by side towards the School. Austin Boycott discussed his book on the system whose name he bore. The goriest examples of its use were evidently the most pleasing to him. A boycott that failed to produce a good many deaths by starvation was plainly lacking in romantic appeal.

Along D'Olier Street his booming voice caused little eddies of consternation among the humdrum morning shoppers. As they continued into Pearse Street his revolutionary opinions battered themselves in wave upon wave against the great faceless side wall of Trinity College. They turned into Westland Row and the severe classical façade of the station frowned grimly at the booming jacobin sentiments that lapped hungrily round it.

Roger listened. He needed to do no more than occasionally put in a conservative word or two to provoke a

further lava flood of progressive eloquence. All too soon they neared the School.

Roger began darting glances round about him. He missed a question from Austin Boycott and for a few moments the wiry frame beside him was silent. But as they entered the square the booming voice broke out again.

The Bosun must have heard it at the very moment that Roger saw him. He was standing on the pavement just outside the entrance to the School with his tent-like overcoat keeping out the cold of a long vigil. Near at hand was the big black American car in which he had taken Roger out towards Bray the evening before. The tiny crouching figure of Collins, the stable lad, could be seen at the wheel. The docker was nowhere in sight.

There was no traffic in the square at the moment of their approach so nothing prevented the booming voice of Austin Boycott reverberating across the thin winter grasspatch, in and out of the iron railings and across to the Bosun.

It certainly seemed to have the magic effect that Boycott had said it would.

The Bosun took one look across the square. He saw Boycott and Roger beside him, and quickly got into the big black car. It left the square already travelling much faster than was safe.

The screech of protesting tyres as it took the corner.

In the hallway of the School Roger excused himself and left Austin Boycott. He entered the office. This time each of the desks on either side of the imposing door was occupied. Etain Bloom gave him a warm smile.

‘Good morning,’ he said. ‘I mean to see you later about those records.’

Miss Hogan gave her colleague a severe look.

Her iron-grey hair set in neat tight curls provided an excellent frame for severe looks. Her striped suit and neat

pair of shoes underneath were of the same grey as her hair. Each toe cap protruded by exactly the same amount from under the little desk with its precise arrangement of in-tray and out-tray, calendar and clock, pencil sharpener and india-rubber, pencil and ballpoint, paperclip dish and ashtray. The ashtray, of contemporary Waterford glass, was gleaming and untouched by ash or butt. Instead four drawing pins rested in it. One at each corner.

‘Gramophone records,’ Roger explained to Miss Hogan. ‘Not office records.’

‘I see,’ said Miss Hogan.

Roger watched her putting the non-office matter out of her mind. This was no time and place to pass judgment on it.

‘Now,’ she said when it had been dealt with, ‘what can I do for Mr Farrar?’

‘It’s about Eric Smith,’ said Roger.

Nothing disturbed the symmetry of her features. Her eyes beneath the neat iron-grey eyebrows looked up at him without the least sign of an evasive side glance.

‘Yes?’

‘I was wondering about his papers. I mentioned the matter to Miss Bloom yesterday, but she didn’t seem able to help me.’

‘What papers?’

Severe politeness.

‘It’s like this,’ Roger went on. ‘I thought he – that is Eric, Mr Smith – might have left some papers which would be worth publishing. I wondered whether ... That is, I just thought that you might know something about them.’

‘I’m afraid I can’t help you at all.’

Measured coldness.

Roger swallowed.

'I - I believe, at least I gathered from Miss Bloom yesterday,' he said, 'that the papers went up to Professor O Nuallain.'

'If you were told that you had no business to be.'

Another severe glance shot across to the opposite desk from under the iron-grey frame of hair.

'Oh damn,' said Etain loudly.

Roger turned and looked at her.

'Well,' she said, 'I nearly bust myself trying to be discreet about it all, and now it turns out that I shouldn't have even told you the wretched papers had gone up to Professor O Nuallain at all.'

Roger thought he saw a tear at the edge of her wide-bridged nose.

He winked at her forcefully and turned back to Miss Hogan.

'The instructions were perfectly clear,' Miss Hogan said. 'Nothing whatever was to be told to anybody about the papers. I hope no such thing will happen again, Miss Bloom. You could easily have led the conversation into other channels.'

'It's all very well being wise after the horse has bolted,' Etain said. 'But I couldn't think of any other channels. Mr Farrar kept on asking me about the damn papers and I didn't know what to say.'

Roger watched Miss Hogan.

He could detect no particular reaction to the disclosure of his keen interest in Eric's papers.

'I'm awfully sorry,' he said. 'I was just chattering on, I'm afraid. As long as the papers are in good hands I'm happy.'

'You can rest assured they are all with Professor O Nuallain,' Miss Hogan said. 'I supervised their despatch personally.'

‘That was very kind of you,’ Roger said. ‘Tell me, were you able to see from them whether Eric was near the end of his project or not?’

‘I don’t understand science,’ said Miss Hogan.

So much for science.

‘All I can say is,’ she added, ‘that the papers were in great disorder. I was quite unable to arrange them before they went up to Palmerston Gardens.’

‘Was Miss Bloom able to give you a hand with the scientific stuff?’ Roger asked.

Blandly.

‘It’s all Grecian to me,’ Etain said.

She sounded very sulky. Roger did not turn to face her.

‘Well then,’ he said, ‘I needn’t worry over that any more.’

He walked over to the heavy door. With his hand on the smooth china knob he stopped.

‘Oh, there was one other thing,’ he said, turning to Miss Hogan. ‘Do you happen to know if Colonel Myles is in today?’

‘Colonel Myles? I’m afraid I can’t say. He doesn’t keep very regular hours here.’

A black mark for Colonel Myles.

‘But doesn’t he ever come in here to pass the time of day?’ Roger said.

‘Oh yes, he does,’ said Etain.

‘No, he does not,’ said Miss Hogan.

Two voices not as one.

Roger standing by the door looked across from desk to desk. Miss Hogan and Etain looked at each other. A slow blush spread on Etain’s white skin.

‘I mean – What I mean is,’ she said, ‘that Colonel Myles has been in here for a chat. But I don’t think you were here Miss Hogan.’

‘Then you’ve no business to detain members of the academic staff while you gossip,’ Miss Hogan said. ‘Working hours are working hours.’

‘I – Well, I –’ said Etain.

A pure stream of indignation.

‘I assure you the boot was on the other shoe,’ she said.

‘I don’t think that was very likely,’ Miss Hogan said. ‘I scarcely think a member of the academic staff would detain you from your work.’

The colour came and went on Etain’s pale face.

‘Look here,’ she said, ‘it so happens that Colonel Myles –’

The heavy door opened an inch or two behind Roger’s back.

‘Did I hear my name?’ said a soft-spoken voice.

Roger stepped away from the door. Colonel Courtney Myles opened it a little farther and put his head into the room.

‘Hello, Etain, my dear,’ he said, ‘and how is your father?’

‘He’s very well, thank you, Colonel,’ Etain answered.

Primly.

Colonel Myles stepped right into the room.

He was a man of about medium height but looked tall because he held himself so erectly and showed no sign of any middle-age spread, although to judge by his weather-beaten complexion and clipped grey hair he must have been well into the sixties. He fingered the spruce strip of moustache on his upper lip and said diffidently:

‘I did hear my name, didn’t I?’

‘Mr Farrar was asking for you, Colonel,’ Miss Hogan said.

Roger was ready for this.

‘I don’t think we’ve had the pleasure of meeting, sir,’ he said.

‘No, I think not,’ answered the colonel.

He gave Roger a quick glance of inspection. Sergeant-major have this man put on a charge, hair needs cutting, boots unpolished, letting himself go to seed.

Roger pulled in his stomach a little.

‘I research into Irish varieties of spoken English,’ he said, ‘and I happened to hear the other day that you were an authority on Cromwell. I wondered if you would be able to give me some background material on the Cromwellian settlement.’

‘I’m by no means an authority,’ Colonel Myles said.

His bright eyes twinkled with pleasure.

‘No,’ he went on, ‘Oliver Cromwell happens to be a bit of a hobby of mine, and so when I retired finally and came over here I thought I’d see if I couldn’t go into the Irish episodes a bit more thoroughly. They were a bad business, a bad business.’

‘I see,’ said Roger, ‘and are you finding Cromwell not as black as he’s been painted? Have you been working long over here?’

‘Ah,’ said the colonel, ‘you mustn’t call it working. Just playing, I’m afraid. I’ve been at it six months now, and I suppose I’m just beginning to realize the immensity of the task.’

‘Did you come over here because you specially wanted to clear Cromwell’s name over Ireland then?’ Roger asked.

‘Ah, no, no. You make me out to be a fanatic,’ Colonel Myles said.

He looked pleased.

‘No, no,’ he went on. ‘I came back to the family home. I’m no sudden arrival. I scarcely set foot in Ireland once I joined the Army more years ago than I care to think, but I’ve finished with all that now and I’ve come back to the family estate. It’s an unpleasant business, you know, renting your

home to other people for close on forty years, but I'm back there now.'

'Oh yes,' said Roger, 'and where is this?'

'It's called Brownstown House, in Wicklow not far from Baltinglass.'

'It must be wonderful to be back. Was it your boyhood home?'

'It was as a matter of fact.'

Again the swift glance of inspection. Sergeant-major, put this man on a charge, dumb insolence.

'Well, I mustn't keep you,' Roger said. 'I can't manage today for our talk about Cromwell - but perhaps you are on your way home in any case?'

'No,' said the colonel, 'I intend to spend the whole day here, tackling some manuscripts. That's what I looked in here for, by the way. Has there been a letter for me?'

'Yes, Colonel,' said Miss Hogan. 'I put it in your file.'

She got up and went across to one of the green filing cabinets standing against the fine plasterwork walls. She pulled it open, extracted without the least hesitation a bulky envelope and handed it to the colonel.

'Ah, just the ticket. Thank you, dear lady.'

'Well, Colonel, good luck with the work,' Roger said.

He turned to Etain.

'I wonder if you would ring for a taxi for me, Miss Bloom?' he said. 'I have to see a friend out in the country.'

Another desperate wink.

Etain picked up the telephone.

Roger watched from behind the tall window beside the School front door until a car that looked like a taxi drew up outside. Quickly he opened the door and ran down the steps.

He bundled into the taxi. The driver leant back across the front seat.

‘Where to, sir?’ he asked.

‘A place out near Baltinglass,’ Roger said. ‘It’s called Brownstown House. Will you be able to find it?’

‘I will so.’

The taxi moved off.

Roger looked out of the back window. As he feared, the big black American car he was beginning to know so well was following at a discreet distance.

He leant forward.

‘How long will it take?’ he asked the taxi man.

‘Ah, it depends on how hard this place is to find when we get to Baltinglass. It shouldn’t be above an hour and a half.’

‘An hour and a half.’

Roger listened to his voice. The right note of flurried dismay.

‘You couldn’t do it in an hour, could you?’

‘I might. It’s a good straight road we have.’

The car gathered speed as soon as it began to leave the city. Roger looked back again. The Bosun’s car was still behind.

He looked again. Now there was less traffic he could see that the figure at the wheel of the big black car was not the diminutive Collins. It was the inflated form of the Bosun himself.

‘Can you go a bit faster?’ he asked the driver.

‘We’re not doing so bad,’ the man said.

But he put his foot down harder on the accelerator. The taxi groaned a bit at the high speed, but Roger had the satisfaction of seeing the big American car slowly falling behind.

The road was fairly straight and it was a long time before the swaying taxi got enough of a lead on the American car for it to drop out of sight. But at last it vanished.

Roger reflected that it was a good thing the Bosun had chosen to drive himself. The little stable lad, Collins, to judge from the previous evening, would have been much harder to throw off.

He did not see the all-white Mark X Jaguar with the sharp-nosed radiator grille dart past the Bosun's black car just as it lost sight of the taxi. He could not have heard the sharp toot of its horn as Collins with the docker beside him took up the chase.

Chapter Eleven

The taxi driver had no difficulty in finding Brownstown House. A prominent signpost pointed to it not far off the main road a couple of miles on the Dublin side of Baltinglass. The house stood in the middle of small dark green fields laced together with grey stone tumbledown walls. It looked as if it had been put down arbitrarily by some giant at play.

Roger let the taxi go at the gates. He had looked in his wallet during the journey and found that he had a reasonable amount of money. He gave the driver a handsome tip. They had reached the house inside the hour. The Bosun's big black American car had probably gone tamely back to Dublin.

Roger walked up the rutted stony drive between great clumps of dripping shrubs, swinging his arms and feeling better than he had done for days. The house stood in front of a small oval patch of stony gravel broken here and there by a tuft of grass. It was a square building in dark brownish stone with a litter of outhouses running away to the far side of it. It gave off an air of dampness.

At the top of the fan-shaped flight of steps leading up to the front door Roger pulled at the bell. After a few moments of silence a clanking sound could be heard deep inside the building. Roger waited. At last he heard muffled footsteps through the door.

It was opened by a tall stooping man of sixty or more wearing a green baize apron. He had a long thin face and mild eyes.

'Ah, good afternoon,' Roger said.

Heartily.

‘Good afternoon, sir,’ said the man.

His mild eyes gradually increased in brilliance. He looked hopefully at Roger. An event at last.

‘Is Colonel Myles at home?’ Roger asked.

The man’s face dropped.

‘Ah, he’s not,’ he said. ‘He’s over down in Dublin.’

‘Oh dear,’ said Roger. ‘I’m a friend of his and I happened to be passing by on a walking tour and I thought I’d look in.’

‘Sure, you only missed him by a couple of hours,’ the man in the green baize apron said. ‘He went into Dublin ...’

He lowered his voice confidentially.

‘... to study Oliver Cromwell. He’s a man of great knowledge, as no doubt you know. He’s after spending weeks and weeks studying Oliver Cromwell, the dear knows why.’

‘I wasn’t sure that I’d find him here at all,’ Roger said. ‘I didn’t know whether this was still his address or not.’

‘Ah, it is and it wasn’t. The colonel’s been back home these six months now, but before that the house was let out rented and myself along with it.’

‘Oh, I see. But the colonel’s back now?’

‘He is so.’

‘And has he owned the house long then?’

‘He has, and his father before him, the old colonel that was. A terrible tradition of service in the British Army the family has.’

‘Oh yes.’

‘Indeed, yes. We thought the colonel himself might not come back here at all now we’re a republic, But he’s settled in wonderful well considering, and now he has Oliver Cromwell.’

‘And you say he’s in Dublin at this moment?’

'He is surely. At what they call the School of Further Studies, though what a fine man like the colonel would want to be going to school for I don't know.'

'Do you know, I think I might head back that way and see if I can meet him. Is there any transport that would get me there reasonably quickly?'

'You'd pick up a bus in Baltinglass all right. The colonel has the car or I could run you there myself.'

'No, no. It's only a mile or two, isn't it?'

'It is. You turn left when you come out of the drive and keep going straight ahead.'

'Well, I'll be off then. Thank you for all your help.'

Roger produced half a crown.

'Thank you, sir.'

The mild eyes which had got brighter and brighter during their conversation blazed to a point where they could almost be said to shine.

'Ah,' the man said, 'it's great to be having the colonel back home again, great, great.'

'I'm sure it must be,' Roger said.

He began to go down the fan-shaped flight of steps.

'When he went back over to Yorkshire just as soon as he'd arrived we thought it would be all travelling and gadding. But thanks be to God it was the only time he spent a night out of the house at all.'

Roger stopped on the fourth step down.

'Yorkshire?' he said.

'Yes. I well remember him coming in from Dublin one day just about the week after he'd arrived here and saying he was hopping across to England, to Yorkshire he said.'

'You don't recall whereabouts in Yorkshire, I suppose?'

'Ah, I disremember if he said at all.'

'It wasn't Leeds, was it?'

The big, mild eyes shone with a pure effulgence.

'Ah I dare say it would have been Leeds. Leeds is in Yorkshire now?'

Roger was thinking.

'Yes, yes,' he answered absently, 'it is.'

'Then that's where the master was going,' the man said. 'To Leeds.'

'You're sure of that?'

'I am entirely.'

'Well, thank you again.'

Roger quickly walked down the rest of the steps and turned into the shrub-shrouded stony drive.

At the last turn before it came to the road Collins and the docker pounced.

The docker's huge, flat palm fastened across the lower half of Roger's face. With his other hand he grasped Roger's arm at the elbow like a clamp. Collins hung on to the other arm twisting it viciously with the whole of his few stones of weight.

Caught.

Stupidly and easily caught. Even after a lucky escape still to treat the pursuers as if they were somehow impotent.

The rage of shame.

To set out so blithely to square the account for Eric's death, to unearth the Bosun's agent and to see that they were made powerless – and to end within a few hours being frogmarched off by a couple of thugs.

Suddenly Roger flung himself round, sending the lightweight Collins sprawling. Before he had time to recover Roger ducked sharply down with the object of sending the broad-shouldered docker over his head. But he failed to lift him off his feet by so much as an inch. Instead the docker's

knee came sickeningly into the small of his back, jerking him upright again.

Collins was on his feet now and came darting in, a savage look in his beady eyes. Roger lashed out with his feet, but the docker changed his grip, catching him by the armpits. He lifted him clear of the rutted drive and shook and shook.

His helpless limbs. A rag doll. His slack jaw sending his lower teeth chopping on to his upper lip. The gasps for mere breath.

At last the docker put him down. He could hardly stand and all the fight had gone out of him once and for all. He scarcely noticed what was happening as the docker and Collins dragged him out of the cover of the overgrown shrubs and bundled him into the back of the white Mark X Jaguar.

In less than a minute the docker was sitting holding him in a kneeling position in the well between the back and front seats of the car. Collins slipped into the driving seat and they headed back towards Dublin with the speedometer teasing the 100 m.p.h. mark.

After ten minutes the pain in Roger's thigh muscles became more than he could bear.

'I won't get out,' he sobbed, 'but let me up.'

'What for?' said Collins across the back of the driver's seat.

'You're hurting me.'

No comment.

'Listen,' Roger said, 'when I tell the Guards there'll be hell to pay.'

'The Guards?' said the docker.

Dismay.

'Yes,' Roger grunted out. 'You don't think I'd let you do this to me and not tell the Guards?'

'Should I let him up?' the docker said.

A plaintive child.

'Ah, let him up then,' said Collins.

The docker took his weight off Roger. He quickly transferred the grip of both hands to his left arm and jerked him on to the seat. The white car leapt forward even faster. Roger was able to see the speedometer, 103 m.p.h. He looked out at the road beside him. An indistinct blur.

He sank back against the seat. The docker concentrated on holding his arm.

'How much are you getting paid for this?' Roger said.

'He's a decent man,' the docker said.

Collins said nothing.

'Ten quid?' Roger asked.

A tiny bubble of hope.

'I wouldn't do a crazy thing like this for ten quid only,' said the docker.

'Is it twenty?'

'It might be.'

'And the same for you?' Roger said into Collins's ear.

'Why would we be paid any different?' said Collins.

He did not take his eyes off the road.

'I'll give you as much again to forget all about it,' Roger said.

The moment of trial. Had the Bosun been speaking the truth when he had said the docker thought the whole thing was a joke? It was possible. It was the Bosun's way of going about things. And a joke could be called off. If the right inducement was offered.

'Forty quid?' said the docker.

Collins said nothing.

'Well?' Roger said.

The silence as the road went spinning away.

‘We could do it,’ said the docker to Collins. ‘Sure, it’s only a joke the boss is playing. Forty quid.’

Roger leant forward a little.

Collins half turned in his seat. The speedometer needle dropped to the ninety mark.

‘I know what class of a joke it is,’ Collins said to Roger. ‘I don’t have to be fed all that stuff. I know what happened to your friend Eric Smith.’

Roger flopped back in the seat.

The sleek low-slung white car sped on towards Dublin.

After a while Roger tried another question. He spoke to Collins.

‘Where are we going?’

No answer.

‘Oh, all right,’ Roger said. ‘Don’t tell me if you don’t want to. But you don’t really think I’ll get away, do you? Not now you mean business?’

He was talking to Collins’s head which came up just to the top of the seat back. Black and shiny.

‘Listen,’ he said, ‘have you thought where all this is leading you? It’s all very fine to take the money – how much is it? More than forty quid anyway – but sooner or later all this is going to catch up with you.’

‘That’s where you’re wrong,’ said Collins.

‘About the money?’ Roger said.

He avoided looking at the docker. He kept his eyes fixed on Collins’s shiny black slicked down hair.

‘No, you’re not wrong about that. You’re wrong about afterwards.’

‘Afterwards?’

‘Look, you don’t think I’m the class of eejit who’d start all this without knowing what it was about, do you?’

‘No,’ said Roger. ‘No, I don’t’

Paying a compliment. Reduced to gross flattery.

The speedometer needle, which he could see in glimpses over the smooth black round of Collins’s head, flicked up to ninety-eight.

Roger glanced at the narrow wedge-shaped face of the docker hammered into place between the vast shoulders. He was looking at Collins with dull eyes flicking to and fro as if there was an actual physical maze to be followed. Had he already taken too many wrong turnings?

It was a last hope. A poor hope.

Collins’s black head tilted back a little more comfortably.

‘Sure,’ he said, ‘it’s all fixed. We hold you until the boss persuades you to go back with him. He’s waiting now till he gets some information he wants from you-know-who, and then –’

‘I don’t know who,’ Roger said. ‘Who do you mean?’

Collins’s head moved forward sharply. The speedometer needle dropped to below ninety.

‘If you don’t know, never mind,’ he said.

‘But I must know.’

‘Ask the boss then – if he’s not too busy dealing with you.’

‘We’re going to him then?’

‘We’re picking him up in Dublin. And then a few days while he persuades you to see things his way and while he makes sure he gets the information he wants, and off you go to England. And after that who’ll call the Guards?’

Roger looked with hatred at the shiny black greased hair slicked so hard down to the round skull.

Silence.

The white Jaguar’s speed crept up again.

The outskirts of Dublin.

Speed slackening. Traffic lights ahead. The needle of the speedometer dropping rapidly. Fifty, forty, thirty, twenty.

They came to a stop.

The docker leant forward. His barrel body was across Roger pinning him like a girder.

Suddenly his thick Dublin voice came into Roger's ear. But his words were intended not for Roger but for Collins.

'So it was more than twenty quid, was it? You bastard. And telling me it was all a cod. Well, we'll see who's coddling now?'

The docker took his hand off Roger's arm and leant forward and caught Collins by the throat.

Roger heaved himself to the side and felt for the door handle.

The door opened easily.

He stepped out. He was standing in the middle of the road among all the cars stopped at the lights.

The driver of a little red Volkswagen looked up at him curiously.

Roger felt for his wallet. He opened it. There were still seven or eight pound notes in it. He took them out and pushed them into the docker's pocket. Then he walked quickly round the back of the white Jaguar, leaving the door still gaping wide.

There were plenty of people on the pavement. He threaded his way through them.

The lights changed to green. He heard the furious hooting caused by the stopped Jaguar.

He turned down a side road. Uncontrollable trembling.

Roger armed with Cuchulain. The slack-muscled lecturer in linguistics and the shaggy prowling wolfhound. Waiting

that evening outside the School of Further Studies. Waiting for Etain Bloom.

Roger thinking about the Infiltrator, reviewing the five possibilities. If only Collins had not availed himself of that mystery-making circumlocution. If only it had been not you-know-who, but a name.

Which name? Which of the five? Etain herself? At least he was in a position to investigate more deeply there. Colonel Myles? The pros and cons neatly and equally stacked in the two round dishes of the scales. The truth he had told about his background. The visit to Leeds, and the family tradition of loyalty to Britain.

Miss Hogan? A blank wall. Neatly arranged bricks in row upon row. Not a chink, not a crevice.

Austin Boycott? Transparent dishonesty. The open contrast between the nut-sweet man and the voluminous acidity of his opinions. And transparency could deceive perhaps better than opaqueness. Which part of him was really to be believed? Or was there even a third layer, safely protected by the openness of the two above it?

And finally George Wyndham. The one Professor O Nuallain could not speak for. Therefore the most likely one. Something must be done urgently about George Wyndham.

Etain appeared at the door of the School outlined against the warm light. She stood for a moment tugging at her coat sleeve where it had got caught back.

Roger hurried forward, hauling Cuchulain behind him.

‘Hello there,’ he said.

‘Why, hello. What are you doing here? Can I pat the dog at all?’

‘Certainly you can. He only looks fierce. We were waiting for you as a matter of fact. I wanted to avoid the jealous eye of Miss Hogan.’

Etain patted Cuchulain on the head. With caution.

‘You’re right there,’ she said. ‘She certainly gets me down. You’d need to have the resistance of a rubber ball to take her all the time.’

‘I’m sorry if I got you into more trouble this morning,’ Roger said.

‘Oh, sure, that was nothing. Something like that’s always happening. Especially now Professor O Nuallain’s not there.’

‘Yes. I can’t see him allowing even Miss Hogan to tyrannize anybody.’

Cuchulain put out a long tongue like a pink shaving strop and licked at Etain’s gloved hand.

‘Well,’ Roger added, ‘at least you’ve got some consolation when you get back to your gramophone.’

‘You’re right there. Two minutes of Rinaldo and I’ve forgotten all about the office.’

Roger smiled.

‘And when am I to have my two minutes of Rinaldo?’ he said.

‘Any time at all. Tonight if you like.’

‘All right. Are you on your way home now?’

‘I am. Let me just nip into a shop and get a tin or two and you can have supper with me.’

She looked down at the enormous shape of Cuchulain.

‘The only thing is I haven’t got anything for him.’

‘That’s all right,’ Roger said. ‘He often doesn’t eat till last thing at night. He’s a bit of a bohemian. But are you sure I’m not thrusting myself on you?’

‘So long as you don’t mind eating out of tins.’

‘I seldom eat out of anything else. But at least let me dive in somewhere and get something to wash it down. A bottle of wine does wonders for the least likely tin.’

‘That’d be wonderful.’

Etain turned her attention from the dog to the master.

'I think we'd better not make it spaghetti or anything,' she said. 'The waistline looks as if it had taken a hammering.'

Roger drew himself sharply in.

Etain laughed.

'Sure, you won't be able to keep that up all evening,' she said. 'But relax. I'll get a nice tin of some sort of meat and I'll let you have a very little rice with it.'

'No potatoes? Don't you make potato cakes?'

'I do. And I'm not going to. From this out you're on the bandwagon for potatoes.'

'I'm beginning to wonder if Handel is worth it,' Roger said as they headed for the shops.

In the bus, once Cuchulain was settled, Roger brought the conversation round to Miss Hogan again.

'Oh, don't let's talk about her,' Etain said, 'I'm sure she's a very good woman and all that, but wherever she and I are there's bound to be some bone of dissension.'

'No,' Roger said, 'tell me about her all the same.'

'There's nothing to tell. She was in the Civil Service when the School began and she happened to get seconded to it as a secretary and there she's been ever since. Of course, she was mad when Professor O Nuallain's personal assistant left and instead of giving her the job they just brought me in as an extra secretary.'

'Well, and what about her life outside the office?'

'Sure, I don't believe she has any at all.'

'Oh, go on. She must have something.'

'Well, she lives in digs somewhere on the south side. She goes to Mass on Sundays and confession once a month. I think she does the English football pools, but she keeps it very dark. And, oh yes, she takes her two weeks' annual holiday at Donaghadee.'

‘You make it sound wildly exciting.’

‘Oh, she gets all her excitement from the office. I’ve only to slip half a sheet of paper into the wrong file and she’s off denouncing me thirteen to the dozen.’

‘Tell me,’ said Roger, ‘have you noticed any change in her just recently?’

Etain frowned. A blonde hair straying across the suddenly severe lines of her forehead.

‘Change? What sort of change?’

‘Well, does she seem to have come into money at all? Has she booked herself a holiday in the south of France instead of Donaghadee, that sort of thing?’

‘Not so far as I’ve noticed.’

She looked at him. A quizzical expression from the butterfly glasses.

‘What on earth do you want to know that for?’

Roger pondered for a moment.

‘I was just wondering if she’s had a sudden increase in wealth,’ he said.

‘But why, for heaven’s sake?’

‘I think I’ll tell you,’ he said.

Slowly. Weighing up. About to venture.

‘Thanks. I’m listening.’

He looked sheepish.

‘I’m sorry,’ he said. ‘I must sound very mysterious. And to tell the truth it is a bit mysterious. If you don’t mind, in fact, I’ll wait to tell you till we’re at your place.’

She raised her eyebrows. Blonde eyebrows behind the blue spectacle frames.

‘I can hardly wait.’

‘I’m sorry. But it won’t be for long.’

‘All right. I thought nothing on earth would come between me and my new record-player, but I’ll have to know what all this is about first.’

‘Did you say: new record-player?’

‘Yes. Didn’t I tell you? It’s my great prime and joy. After all those years with that battered old soundbox I’ve suddenly come into a bit of money and lashed out on the very latest in radiograms.’

The bottom falling out of the world.

Chapter Twelve

‘Why, whatever’s the matter?’ Etain said. ‘Have I put my foot in my mouth or something? You look as if you’d just heard the world was coming to an end.’

‘No,’ said Roger.

‘Well, what is it? Go on, tell me. If I’ve dropped a brick just tell me. It wouldn’t be the first.’

‘No, no. It’s not that at all.’

Thoughts whirling.

‘It’s – It’s just that I’ve suddenly thought. This is Tuesday and not Monday, isn’t it?’

The voice convincingly doleful.

‘Yes, of course it’s Tuesday.’

‘And I’ve been thinking all the afternoon it was Monday. You see, I’ve got an appointment for this evening if it is Tuesday.’

‘For heaven’s sake, who with? What time is it you’ve got to be there?’

Roger’s mind was working well now.

‘There’s a first night at the Gate tonight,’ he said. ‘It’s that play by Yeats and George Moore that somebody dug up. And I promised to meet George Wyndham there.’

Etain looked at the thin gold watch on her wrist.

‘What time does it begin?’ she asked. ‘This doesn’t keep very good time, but I think you could be there by half seven easily.’

‘Then I’ll be all right,’ Roger said. ‘I could even take Cuchulain back to the flat. But what about you? I come all this way out with you and then let you down.’

Etain smiled.

'I'm not worried,' she said. 'It isn't as if I had been going to be doing anything tonight anyway. I'd say I'd look after Cuchulain, only I'd be scared to. Now, what about tomorrow? That's Wednesday, you know. Are you doing anything tomorrow night?'

'No,' said Roger.

'You don't sound too delighted.'

'I'm sorry. I am really. I'd love to come, if you can forgive me for walking out on you tonight. It was just that I was thinking how absent-minded I'm getting.'

'Don't worry about - But, look, here's a stop. You'd better jump off here. You'll be all the quicker getting back.'

'Yes, yes. You're right. Thanks. Thank you. Come on, Cuchulain. I'm sorry.'

Roger walking crab-wise down the aisle of the bus with Cuchulain unwilling to follow without taking a formal farewell of Etain.

Roger tugged angrily at the leash as he hauled the big dog on to the pavement.

'I'm looking forward to hearing the secret,' Etain called to him.

'Secret?'

The bus jerked sharply forward and Etain was carried away looking back out of the lighted window and grinning and waving.

Roger lugged Cuchulain grimly back to the flat and shut him in the little bedroom that made him a kennel of just about the right size. Cuchulain showed less than his usual patience over this, grumbling and wheezing like a disgruntled churchwarden.

Roger knew quite well what the dog was feeling. His own bad temper and indecision were producing the same

symptoms in Cuchulain.

There was nothing he seemed able to make up his mind about. Had he suddenly been given proof that Etain herself was the Bosun's Infiltrator? Half the time it seemed plain to him that she had betrayed herself, that she had taken money from the Bosun for providing information and had injudiciously splurged out on a new record-player. And half the time it seemed incredible that she could be as light-hearted as she seemed if, as a sequel, the Bosun had bullied her into entering Eric's flat and putting something into his stout.

Yet, if she had decided to brazen things out, she was behaving in exactly the way she would have to make herself behave.

Roger prowled up and down his sitting-room completely unable to make up his mind. And on the other side of the much-scratched door of the kennel room the enormous wolfhound, scorning the food Roger had put down for him, prowled back and forth in sympathetic parody.

At last Roger grabbed at a decision. He looked at his watch and found that there might still be time to get to the Gate before the first night began. He had told Etain this was what he was going to do, and perhaps it would be worth doing after all. One thing was certain: George Wyndham would be there. A Dublin first night would draw him as surely as a magnet draws a stray iron filing;

And, if Etain's sudden acquisition of the record-player was after all merely a coincidence, then Wyndham might be the Infiltrator. He had to be seen at once. He was one of the five that Professor O Nuallain did not trust.

Perhaps he could be trapped into incriminating himself and clearing Etain at one and the same time.

Roger succumbed briefly to a new bout of indecision about Cuchulain. With the formidable looking dog by his side

he ought to be safe from attacks by the Bosun's followers, but on the other hand whenever he took him into company there was almost always some sort of difficult scene.

Eventually he decided to stick to his self-imposed rule and leave the hulking brute behind. After all, the Bosun did not know where he was going. Unless Etain was busy at this very moment on the telephone telling him ...

He slammed out of the flat and ran as quickly as he could all the way down to the Gate. The physical release from too complicated thoughts.

When he got to the theatre – puffing, sweaty and feeling slightly sick – he found that at least his guess about George Wyndham had been right. He was standing in the foyer peering out through his impossibly circular hornrims at the bustle of late comers, like a being of a different species. In honour of the occasion he had reunited the dark blue jacket with the trousers it had started out together with on life's long journey. But this was his sole concession to formality. The suit was accompanied by a soft plain green shirt and a loose tie of brown wool. His pockets bulged on either side with the hard outlines of slabby works of literature.

'Why, hello,' said Roger, stepping forward through the jostle.

George Wyndham looked pleausurably surprised. It was not often that he was the one to be greeted.

Roger felt slightly ashamed.

'Have you got a ticket for this?' he said.

Heartily.

'Yes. Yes, I have,' Wyndham answered. 'It sounds as if it ought to be most interesting. And awfully cheap too.'

'Well, you're a cleverer man than I am,' Roger said. 'Obviously I've left it much too late.'

Wyndham fished in the inside pocket of the sagging navy blue jacket and produced a bulging wallet.

‘Let me see now,’ he said.

He brought the circular austerity hornrims into close focus on the mass of cards and papers in the wallet.

‘Ah, yes, here we are.’

He extracted a bright orange ticket and checked that it was for this occasion.

‘Yes. Look, would you like it? I can see this on any other night. I’ve no particular engagements.’

Roger felt a hot blush starting up from his waist, rapidly sinking down to his knees, and slowly mounting up towards his chest. He concentrated on not letting it get into his face.

At the level of his armpits he felt it beginning to slacken in intensity.

‘I couldn’t think of it,’ he said firmly. ‘It was entirely my own fault for not booking in good time. And I certainly won’t deprive you of the honour and glory of knowing all about the play before anyone else. But I’ll tell you what I will do. I’ll go and install myself in the bar and you can come and talk to me in the interval.’

Amende honorable.

Roger spent the time of the first act of ‘Diarmuid and Grania’ in the theatre bar, a gaudy place with an air of having been knocked up out of something else. He began thinking with care about what he was to say to George Wyndham. Occasionally snatches of dialogue floated in when an usherette came out of the auditorium.

‘... Hush, Child, love has made you wise as the bird in the wood that seeks a mate ...’

It would be no good tackling Wyndham with knowing the Bosun. He had only to deny it. There was no way of making him talk.

‘... I am weary of Conan’s bitter tongue, Finn. I would beat him from the table ...’

The thing to do would be to trap him somehow into saying something he ought not to know about.

‘... Diarmuid must go out against the boar and be killed. It was to kill him that the shepherd made the spell over his second son ...’

But what was there that he ought not to know about? Eric, obviously. He should scarcely have known Eric at all. Eric had always avoided him, so –

‘... we must tell him that they have gone eastward towards the sea.’ Evidently the curtain line. Applause. Hesitant, respectful, swelling.

People began to come into the bar. George Wyndham was in the first wave.

‘What’ll you have?’ Roger said.

‘Oh, whiskey. Whiskey, please. It must be whiskey on a night like this. The wine of the country.’

Roger ordered two whiskeys.

‘Now I would say that stout was the wine of the country,’ he said. ‘Do you drink stout, Mr Wyndham?’

‘Ah, it’s very interesting that you should say that. Because Yeats and Moore constantly refer to ale in the play. It struck me as being not quite proper Irish. I wondered if Moore –’

This could not be allowed to go on.

‘Some of us coming over here take to stout in a big way,’ Roger said.

With meaning.

‘Did you know Eric Smith?’ he went on. ‘Now he was a great stout drinker.’

‘Eric Smith? I don’t think I knew him. But that’s a curious thing. Now, you couldn’t possibly use the word stout in a poetic play of this sort. Think how the very sound would

bring the level thumping down. No, this is rather a nice problem. Ale we are agreed is too English, and stout –'

'I'm surprised you didn't know Eric. He was a mathematician, you know.'

'No, no.'

Wyndham's sharp interruption.

Roger leant forward.

'So you know what Eric's work really was?' he said.

'No,' Wyndham went on blithely, 'mead wouldn't do either. It's Celtic all right, mind. But too Cornish, altogether too Cornish.'

He stared dreamily at the two brightly painted little doors, marked one Mna and the other Fir.

'I'm so sorry you didn't manage to get a ticket,' he said. 'I think this is a really historic night, really historic. We are seeing – no, witnessing – the emergence of a magnificent drama imbued with the essence of a great dramatic revival years after it took place. It's simply –'

'Tell me,' said Roger, 'is your work over here nearly finished?'

The brusque remark penetrated Wyndham's cloud at last.

'What was that?' he said.

'I asked if your work over here was near its end.'

'My work?'

'Yes, what you came over here to do.'

'Oh, but I didn't come over here to do anything in particular. I've got so much on hand one way and another. But luckily it doesn't matter much where I am to do it. And when I happened to come over here for a holiday in the summer I was so much struck with the place. Well, to be frank I realized it would be much cheaper for me to live over here. I mean look at the price of my ticket.'

'I thought you told me before that you came over here because Ireland was civilized. Now you're telling me that it was because it is cheap. You don't seem very sure of your reasons.'

Behind the austerity hornrims George Wyndham blinked. His Adam's apple bobbed two or three times in rapid succession.

Roger crowded in.

'I'm beginning to wonder what exactly you did come over here for,' he said.

'What exactly -'

'Yes. First you talk about civilization. Then you invent another tale about cheapness. What was your real reason, I wonder, Mr Wyndham. Were you actually sent over here?'

'Sent over? I don't understand.'

'Were you sent over with a mission to perform? Isn't it nearly over? Look here, it's no use trying to keep your secret from me: you're just not good enough at it.'

Wyndham was beginning to look acutely uncomfortable.

'Listen,' Roger said, 'we'd better have a quiet talk. I've a feeling you're going to catch a late night plane for England tonight.'

Suddenly Wyndham banged down his glass on the narrow bar.

'I shall do no such thing,' he said. 'I'm going back in to watch the rest of the play now. Ireland is just the place for me, and I'm certainly not thinking of leaving. I'd be very much obliged if you'd go away.'

He glared at Roger through the circular hornrims. His pasty complexion had turned a shade whiter. He looked ready to lash out, but suddenly turned instead and scuttled through the knots of people back into the safety of the auditorium.

Roger was tempted for a moment to give chase. But before he had time to set off doubts came rushing in again. Had Wyndham betrayed himself now? Or had his ambiguous replies been merely the result of his complete preoccupation with the correctness of his feelings over the collaboration of Yeats and Moore?

It was impossible to tell.

A sullen rage spread through Roger's mind.

Angrily he made his way back to his flat.

The evening was not very cold. A mild wind was blowing in playful gusts from the west pushing huge untidy black clouds in front of it. Roger looked up. In the gaps between the clouds he could see a few stars.

He walked more slowly, breathing in the fresh air.

An early night would put things in a better light. And in any case he needed sleep. The slight ache in the small of his back. Lying in bed would deal nicely with that.

He pushed himself to walk a little faster. He turned the last corner. The short length of shabby street lying ahead of him. The familiar combination of unspoilably fine architecture and the litter of slum rubbish on the pavements – old newspapers, a tin can or two, the remains of children's abandoned toys.

Collins was making no effort to conceal himself.

He stood directly under the lamp almost opposite the door of the house Roger's flat was in. He wore a belted overcoat but no hat. The light shone on the rounded slickness of the black hair above the dead white face. He carried a battered looking evening paper.

Its possibilities long ago exhausted.

Roger stopped in his tracks.

The sound of his footsteps must have been quite clear in the deserted strip of narrow street, but Collins did not even look up at their abrupt cessation.

He had no need to, evidently. If Roger wanted to get back to his flat he would have to go right into his line of vision. He had no need to bother himself with looking up at every chance sound.

Roger turned away.

He walked quickly back to O'Connell Street and the bright lights. He thought he could see what was in the Bosun's mind: Cuchulain.

He had been a fool not to keep Cuchulain with him all the time. What would a few awkward scenes have mattered? And now the Bosun was virtually holding the big wolfhound to ransom. Luckily there was no immediate problem. He had had the sense to put down some food and Cuchulain would be perfectly happy until morning.

But sooner or later the flat would have to be visited. And that would mean putting himself simply and quietly back into the Bosun's hands.

After a while he turned and approached the flat again. Collins had looked as if he had already had a long wait. Perhaps he might take a few minutes off. Just time to dart in and rescue Cuchulain.

The man in Collins's place was unfamiliar, but there could be no mistaking the fact that he was there for a purpose.

A burly, solid figure. Long black overcoat falling straight from the shoulders, round black bowler hat with an unusually curly brim. In the lamplight it was not difficult to make out his features. A squarish face with a big straight nose and under it a black moustache with something of the same curl to its ends as the black bowler above. Altogether an air of ponderous respectability.

Roger turned away. He walked fast through the crowded evening streets. He ignored the cheerful green buses threading their way through the happy-go-lucky traffic. It

was not until he had gone all the way to Grafton Street that he stopped.

A thought had struck him. There was not only Cuchulain. Where was he to sleep himself?

He took out his wallet. The money he had given so gleefully to the docker had left him with only a single ten shilling note. In his trouser pocket besides a bunch of keys there were three sixpences.

Of course, he could stay at a hotel and go round to the bank before paying his bill. Only, a person without any luggage whatsoever, in spite of a moderately respectable appearance, might not find it too easy to get into a hotel. And the Bosun could easily post someone outside his bank in the morning. It would be an obvious move. If he planned anything he would need money. Here was a way of finding him easily and economically.

In the meantime there was the problem of his bed that night. He walked round the corner and went into Davy Byrne's while he thought about it.

When he had got his drink he settled down and looked round. He seemed to know one or two of the people in the bar by sight, which was not surprising in a city as small as Dublin, but he could certainly not put a name to any one of them. Much less go up and ask to borrow money.

There were his colleagues at the School. He could always ring one of them up and arrange to call and collect a loan.

He suddenly realized that he did not intend to go near the School again if he could help it until the Bosun had retired from the struggle. The blatancy of this new campaign was too alarming. The Bosun must obviously have some pretty foolproof plans to plant his men so openly.

And there was only one way to combat such moves. To hide. And from whatever hiding place he chose – it need not be very obscure – to launch out at unexpected moments

and pursue his inquiry into the Infiltrator. After all, the Bosun's resources were not endless: he could not watch everybody all the time.

Roger leant back and took a long, reflective drink. Surely this was the way out. The Bosun had other fish to fry when all was said and done. He could not stay in Dublin indefinitely. At present he had his Infiltrator to keep watch for him. But once they had been detected ...

Professor O Nuallain was by no means without influence in high places. A man of his immense stature, a world figure, could get things done quickly and quietly. A word in the right place and the Infiltrator would be out of the country in a couple of hours.

Roger's easily spurting elation flickered slowly down. He had contrived to thrust out of his mind in these last hours the figure of his dying chief. But now the thought had obtruded in spite of himself.

He sat sombrely amid the noise of the crowded bar until the barmen looked as if they were on the point of calling 'Time'. Then he joined the rush to get hold of a last drink at the low wall of bottle-ends that constituted the bar.

Another large whiskey.

He downed it in one.

The tangy shot.

And he knew what he would do. He went to the corner where the telephone was kept. He leafed through the book. They were an unexpectedly numerous clan, but at last he found the number he was looking for.

Bloom, Miss Etain, Dublin 42632.

Chapter Thirteen

The big black clouds were scurrying raggedly across the moon. A gusty wind was blowing in from the sea, salty but not cold. Roger crossed the road from the bus stop in accordance with Etain's instructions. He made his way back along the route he had travelled looking for the entrance to the lane she had said he was to go down.

He found it without difficulty and stepped hesitantly into the thick darkness between the high walls on either side. He took a few slithering steps along the muddy surface of the lane and then halted. He felt round about until his outstretched hand touched the left-hand wall.

Cautiously he stepped towards it and flattened himself against the slimy wet stones. He settled down to wait.

Some way of stopping himself asking why he had come. To avoid at all costs dwelling on the possible consequences of his sudden need for this visit, to a girl he hardly knew. Something to stop himself feeling he was taking an absurd risk while he stood in the darkness waiting.

The advantages of a word-loving mind. The stored memory.

'A Grammarian's Funeral'. 'The Deserted Village'.

Roger strained his ears. The wind buffeted the branches of the big tree over his head and it was difficult to account for all the various sounds of the night.

He decided not to take risks. A couple of minutes more. Something comparatively short. And appropriate. Yeats.

'Among School Children'.

By now Roger's eyes were well accustomed to the darkness. He took one final long, careful look round.

No one.

He set off confidently along the lane looking for the white gate off its hinges at the top. It was not difficult to find. He went through the gap and approached the looming house.

Etain's instructions were clear, except that the bell knob was on the left and not the right. But Etain was unlikely to be very sure about which was which.

Roger pulled the bell. Once. Twice. Three times. Very far away in the deep interior of the house he heard a dim jangling.

Who else was waiting to hear it?

Roger waited.

There was no sign of life. He peered up at the broken cliff of brick above him. The occasional moonlight was reflected from irregularly placed windows, but there seemed to be no sign of any other light.

Good or bad?

He reached forward to pull at the knob again. And as he did so he caught the sound of clicking heels.

He listened. He could hear no accompanying steps of any sort. But the trap would not be sprung outside the house. It would be set in Etain's flat. If trap there was.

The arch-shaped front door with its seamed and lined paintwork swung open. In the darkness he recognized Etain.

'I didn't put on the light,' she said. 'You told me you wanted nobody to know you were here.'

Roger detected no sign of nervousness in her voice.

'It sounds very melodramatic, I'm afraid,' he said.

'It does. And I'm longing to know what it's all about. Will I go out into the garden now and pretend I only came down to pick a handful of herbs? I often do that in the late hours, truly.'

‘No, I don’t think that will be necessary. I made sure no one followed me out here.’

But there was no way of making sure that no one waited in the flat.

‘Then I’ll put on the light,’ Etain said. ‘I nearly killed myself two or three times coming down in the pitch black.’

A tiny bulb hanging from the high ceiling of the hall gave out a dull orange glow. It revealed an interior constructed with distinct reference to its previous ecclesiastical function as a rectory. The walls were covered for half their height with panels of shiny pinewood and the banisters of the big flight of imposing stairs were of the same material. Each newel post bore a large knob carved in the form of a mitre.

The windows, which showed blackly in the dim orangeish light, were in the shape of sharply pointed arches with leaded lights and rims of pale coloured stained glass. On the blank wall opposite the front door there was a small stone platform suitable for the statue of a saint.

Roger looked up at the little orange bulb. Had it been switched on as a signal? Did it mean: he is alone, be ready?

‘I live right at the top,’ Etain said. ‘It’s rather a long trend, I’m afraid, but at least the rooms are reasonably small when you get there. Down here they’re enormous.’

Roger followed her up the shiny pinewood stairs. She was wearing a light sage green woollen dress and her hair, no longer in its ineffective chignon, fell in a blonde mass on to her shoulders.

The stairs from the second floor to the third were narrower and strictly secular.

Roger looked at them. Would he get a chance even to come tumbling down them in front of the Bosun’s men?

‘Servants’ quarters,’ Etain said. ‘They make a nice little flat.’

At the top a Yale lock had been put into the door across the head of the stairs. Etain pushed and the door swung open.

‘I leave it on the snub,’ she said. ‘I’m always forgetting my key.’

Was there some significance in that?

Etain went in. Roger took a deep breath and followed. He closed the door behind him.

Nothing happened.

Little Collins and the tall black-coated man he had seen outside his flat did not pounce.

Roger stood for a moment at the door of the little sitting-room. It was obvious that Etain was the only person in it. The room looked cosy and inviting. A bright fire burnt in the narrow grate of the painted iron mantelpiece. Although basically the room was rather forbidding with its narrow walls papered in a bilious yellow colour and its single window of puritanical straightness, the cheerful little fire made it entirely welcoming. By its light the gay scattering of Etain’s additions to the decoration looked more than transient. A collection of glass animals above the fireplace, lilac gingham curtains frilled round the window, little cushions peppering the two big old armchairs, a doll with a wide skirt lying beside the telephone she was meant modestly to envelop.

‘Well, now,’ said Etain, ‘put your coat to hang on the pegs there and then come in and tell me all about it.’

Roger hung his coat among the litter of scarves and exhausted mackintoshes on the pegs in the hallway.

All right, the Bosun was not there. But perhaps Etain had not been able to get hold of him. It could still be that she was the Infiltrator.

He came to a decision.

‘All right,’ he said as he went into the sitting-room, ‘I will tell you everything. I can’t go on really without telling someone.’

Etain, sitting on the floor leaning back against the corner of one of the big ugly armchairs, smiled up at him.

‘The thing is,’ Roger said, ‘that I have a secret, which I used to think only Professor O Nuallain knew. And now I’ve found out that somebody else at the School has got hold of it. Well, I’m determined to find out who.’

He felt that the very name of O Nuallain would act somehow as a talisman. It would bring the truth to light.

He looked down at Etain. She showed no change of expression. The blonde hair falling unevenly on her shoulders.

‘I need somebody to confide in,’ Roger said.

Etain smiled again.

‘You can talk to me,’ she said.

A simple statement.

Roger grinned wryly.

‘Nothing could be easier. Only you may be the person I’m looking for.’

She looked suddenly startled.

‘But – but –’ she said. ‘But there must be something I can say that would convince you. Honestly, I’ve not the least hesitation in assuring you I don’t even know what it is you’re talking about.’

The candid eyes. Can eyes lie?

They clouded.

‘I suppose whatever I say you’ll only think I’m pulling on an act,’ she said.

‘Exactly,’ said Roger. ‘So there’s only one thing to do.’

Etain, almost crouching on the floor, looked up at him. Roger turned and strode up and down the confined space of

the little room.

‘Eric Smith was murdered,’ he said. ‘His death came about because the work he was doing in England was so secret that he could not be allowed to live once he had refused to go on with it.’

‘So that’s why he came over. I sometimes wondered if he was a refugee.’

Roger did not bother to look at her. The prepared reaction would tell him nothing.

‘Apparently,’ he said, ‘the same fate does not await me – yet. I’m to be captured alive.’

Now he turned and looked at her. She was still sitting on the floor, but she was no longer leaning on the corner of the armchair. Instead she was bolt upright, looking at him with wide open eyes.

‘That’s why I asked you to take me in,’ he said. ‘I hope it’s not going to get you into trouble with the landlord here.’

Etain gave a little half-forced smile.

‘Oh, no,’ she said. ‘This place is a refuse of free thought. I think a couple even lived in sin in the flat below once – though not for long, of course.’

Roger flopped down in the other sprawling knobbly armchair. He looked at Etain sombrely.

‘I got all this from Bosenwite himself,’ he said.

‘Bosenwite?’

She shook her head slowly. An argument not followed. A familiar event.

Roger sat forward.

‘Very well,’ he said, ‘as far as I could tell you were genuinely bewildered by the name Bosenwite. It’s a pretty feeble test, but I shall have to abide by it. Bosenwite is Professor William Bosenwite, head of the Institute for

Human Relations, Leeds, which is a place where they are working on a new form of brainwashing.'

'Brainwashing? Now I begin to understand. You didn't like it, and so you came over here. In the last war it used to be the physicists.'

'Exactly.'

'And you're a brainwashing expert as well as Eric?'

'I'm not a psychologist. I was what the Bosun - that's Bosenwite - used to call a member of the Department of Applied Linguistics.'

'But what did you do?'

Roger smiled.

'That's what I'm bound by the Official Secrets Acts not to tell you,' he said.

'But you were going to tell me everything.'

'Yes. And I am. Everything that matters. But I've entered into a sort of bargain with myself not to give away any secrets I'm officially obliged to keep.'

Etain plucked at a thread in the carpet.

'All the same,' she said, 'can't you give me a hint what it is you do? I mean just to say you work in the Department of Applied Linguistics -'

'That's only its joke name.'

'Well, that makes it worse.'

She pouted.

Roger stirred uneasily in the big armchair. Not with physical discomfort.

'Why do you want to know?' he asked.

She looked up at him in frank amazement.

'Why wouldn't I want to know?' she said. 'Don't you ever want to know anything that's a mystery.'

Roger smiled.

‘All right,’ he said, ‘I can’t go on and on doubting. I’ll give you a rough outline.’

Suddenly a look of intense concern swept over her.

‘No, no,’ she said. ‘Your bargain. You mustn’t go back on it. Don’t say a word.’

Roger laughed.

‘I’ll be a model of discretion, I promise,’ he said. ‘I’ll do no more than hint at what I was actually doing.’

He looked round the little cosy room. The glass animals twinkling on the mantelpiece, the little fire popping away, the frilly curtains moving gently in the faint draught coming through the elderly window.

‘During the 1914-18 war,’ he said, ‘a German newspaper once published a report that on the fall of Antwerp the church bells were rung, that is the German church bells. A French paper took up the story and put it that the Belgian clergy had been compelled to ring their own bells. Then the Paris correspondent of *The Times* filed a story saying that priests who refused to ring the bells were driven from their churches. An Italian paper picked this up and got the priests sentenced to hard labour. Finally, the French paper that first took the story from the German Press published a second report, crediting the Italians, which confirmed that the priests were punished for their heroic refusal by being used as living clappers in the bells.’

‘Are you making it all up?’

‘No, I’m not, really. If I had my notes here I could tell you the very names of the papers. But you see the point, don’t you? That all happened by accident, but it had a splendid effect on French morale. Now, if you could arrange similar things a bit more scientifically –’

‘But that would be cheating.’

Roger smiled.

‘You’ve gone to the heart of the matter,’ he said.

‘And that’s what you were doing?’

‘That’s the germ of it.’

She frowned.

‘But I still don’t see quite how you go about it.’

‘Oh, it’s basically perfectly simple. Take a classic example of jumping a word’s meaning. We say that the gardener mows the lawn, but actually he doesn’t: the lawnmower does the mowing. Well, you can jump meanings along bit by bit in that way until you’re saying what you want people to believe without needing any awkward facts to back you up.’

‘No wonder you wanted to come over here.’

‘It took me a long time to see it, though. Partly I was the victim of my own techniques. You can make people forget as well as making them create, you know.’

‘You mustn’t tell me anything that goes beyond your agreement.’

The schoolgirl honesty.

‘I won’t. This is all well-known stuff. For instance, it was pointed out years and years ago that by calling a body by a name based on its initials you gradually make people forget what the body’s true aim is. It’s perfectly simple.’

‘And how did you come to do this in the first place?’

He grinned.

‘It was a matter of administration,’ he said. ‘I began working for a highly respectable Government department on perfectly innocuous subjects. Then for financial reasons that particular department was closed and what was kept of its functions were transferred to other departments. My section happened to come under the War Office. And to comply with regulations I was given a commission. So I found myself under orders, and after a bit my orders were to work for the Bosun.’

‘But eventually you and Eric Smith decided to give it up and come over here?’

‘Yes. And Professor O Nuallain looked after us both. You can imagine how much I feel I owe him.’

‘But how did all the present trouble come about then?’

‘Oh, one day last summer the Bosun happened to be over here and Eric couldn’t resist shouting some insults at him. And a few months later Eric was killed. The Bosun told me himself that he had seen to it.’

‘The Bosun – you said his name was Bosenwite, didn’t you – what does he look like?’

‘Oh, you can’t mistake him once you’ve seen him. He’s a huge fat man with a terrible deep pink face and pale goldy hair.’

‘Then I think I have heard of him after all,’ she said. ‘He must be the person Fergus was talking about last summer.’

‘Fergus?’

‘Oh, you know, Fergus Peck.’

Roger abruptly sat forward in his chair.

‘Fergus Peck,’ he said, ‘you mean the chap who was Professor O Nuallain’s personal assistant until you came to the School?’

‘Well, there aren’t two Fergus Pecks in Dublin so far as I know.’

‘No, of course not. It was just that I hardly know him. I know so few people over here really. And you say he was talking about the Bosun last summer?’

‘Yes, but –’

‘Don’t you see? He was Professor O Nuallain’s personal assistant. The professor trusted him. He would have access to all the papers. If it is him ...’

The hard line of Roger’s mouth. His set eyes.

‘Where does he live?’ he said. ‘Where can I get hold of him?’

Etain looked at the thin gold watch on the velvety whiteness of her wrist.

‘It’s late,’ she said. ‘He’ll be safely tucked up in his bed. But if you want to see him I can get hold of him easy enough at the Department of External Affairs in the morning and fix up somewhere for you to meet.’

‘Can it be early?’

Etain smiled up at him from the floor.

‘I’ll make it as early as he can possibly get away,’ she said. ‘Does that satisfy you?’

Roger smiled down at her.

‘All right,’ he said. ‘I’ll calm down till morning.’

Etain got up. Bending forward and putting her weight on the outspread fingers of one hand.

‘And I must be off,’ she said. ‘Or I’ll miss the last bus.’

‘Off?’

‘Yes, off home. To my parents. You didn’t think I was going to stay here, did you?’

Roger looked shamefaced.

Etain smiled. A glint of humour in the wide almond eyes.

‘I have a bag packed,’ she said. ‘And Mammy is expecting me. She likes me to spend the night once in a while.’

‘I – I’ll see you to the bus.’

‘No, you’d better not. There might be complications about getting back in.’

‘But –’

‘No, honestly, I’ll be quite all right. I know my way around here dark or light.’

She went out of the cosy little sitting-room leaving the door ajar. Roger watched her hoick her coat off one of the

pegs. He hurried out to help her on with it, but she had hunched into it before he could get there. He straightened the collar for her.

‘Thanks,’ she said. ‘I’m always finding I’ve left it half up all the way to work or something.’

He stood watching her while she dipped into the bedroom and caught hold of a small overnight case.

‘I must rush,’ she said, ‘or I really will miss the bus. My watch is none too good.’

‘It’s eleven eight exactly.’

‘Sure, it must be marvellous to know. And that means I’m in fine time. Make yourself at home, now, won’t you? You’ll find everything you want. Cook yourself a decent breakfast, mind.’

She whirled out.

He looked at her going down the stairs in the orangeish light.

‘Are you sure you don’t want me to see you to the bus stop?’

‘Quite sure. Good night so.’

‘Good night.’

Just after nine next morning she telephoned to tell Roger that she had already arranged a meeting with Fergus Peck.

‘But what did you tell him I wanted to see him about, for heaven’s sake?’ Roger asked.

‘Nothing.’

‘What do you mean “nothing”? Surely, he wouldn’t go out of his way to see someone he scarcely knows for no reason at all?’

‘That’s just what he would do. It’s his weakness. I mean he’s a terribly hard worker and all that and he has the

patience of a saint, but if you tell him he'll hear something to his advantage he'll go miles just to find out what it is.'

'Tell me,' said Roger, 'has he often been back to the School since he left? You seem to know him well.'

'Oh yes, he's always dropping in for a gossip.'

'And you say he'll be in O'Brien's Bar at eleven.'

'He will.'

Roger left the flat as quickly as he could. It had occurred to him that already the Bosun's plans might have been thrown out by his not attempting to get to his own flat the night before. But he found Collins back on guard again. The exhausted evening paper had been replaced by a morning one. Already this was looking much the worse for wear.

Roger thought of Cuchulain in his kennel room. He would be hungry by now, and puzzled. But he would scarcely be suffering much. If by the end of the morning the Bosun learnt that his Infiltrator had been found out, Cuchulain might yet eat his evening meal in peace. In any case there was always the R.S.P.C.A.

As the clocks struck eleven Roger was outside O'Brien's Bar just off Grafton Street. As he turned to go in, in one of the old, blotched and distorting mirrors on either side of the door he saw the man in the black overcoat who had taken over the guard outside his flat from Collins.

It must have been the purest coincidence that he was there because at the very moment that Roger recognized the burly figure with the curly brimmed black bowler hat the man obviously noticed him. He gave a start of surprise and was on the point of stepping into the road to cross when a wild car shooting by stopped him.

Roger looked along the street. It was possible that he could run off and contrive to lose his pursuer somewhere. He looked into the bar through the half-open door. There sitting quietly at a marble-topped table was Fergus Peck.

He would not come a second time to hear something to his advantage.

Chapter Fourteen

Roger entered the bar.

The long, narrow room was sombre, its walls heavily panelled in mahogany broken up here and there with a cardboard advertisement faded to a misty grey. The bar itself ran along the whole length of the room, a single slab of pinkish polished granite. Opposite was a long bench too narrow to sit on in comfort. Here and there along its length were little round marble-topped tables at one of which Fergus Peck was sitting fiddling with a small glass of pale, pale sherry.

At the very far end of the bar, where an almost totally obscure notice pointed to a hidden telephone, a solitary crushed-looking man leant heavily against the pinkish granite and drank greedily at a whiskey. Near the door two other men were in earnest conversation.

‘Ah sure,’ said one to the other, ‘it’s no good trying to do business without a jar at all.’

‘Sure, wasn’t I just after saying the same thing meself?’ his friend replied. ‘Wasn’t I after saying that if Charlie Doyle and I have a quiet drink this whole thing can be settled without any trouble at all?’

Roger let the heavy door thump to behind him. He turned and looked through the clear lettering which broke up the thick opaque glass panel in the top of the door. He could see the man in the long black overcoat quite easily. He was standing on the far side of the road looking at the frontage of the bar with ponderous reflection.

Suddenly he turned and entered a small café nearly opposite. For a moment Roger was at a loss. Then he saw

the sign outside the café proclaiming that it, like O'Brien's Bar, was equipped with a telephone.

He calculated that he would have a few minutes at least to talk to Fergus Peck without interruption.

He walked down the bar until he got to the round marbletopped table with its load of a single glass of palest sherry.

'Hello, Mr Peck,' he said.

Fergus Peck looked up with interest.

He had a round face with a fuzz of prematurely greying hair sticking up a little on either side. His two large limpid eyes were separated by a small beaky nose. He wore a bowtie, blue with very small white spots.

'Ah,' he said, 'Farrar. Etain Bloom said you would meet me here.'

He bobbed to his feet.

'What can I get you to drink?'

'No, no,' said Roger. 'Let me get you another of those. What is it?'

Fergus looked down at the three-parts-full glass of pale amber liquid.

'Well,' he said, 'it's a bit unusual for me, but perhaps I will. It's their extra dry sherry. It's very good.'

A secret confided.

Roger crossed to the bar. The solitary mournful curate behind it drifted up to him.

'Two of your extra dry sherries,' Roger said.

'Extra dry it is,' said the curate.

He set two glasses briskly on the variegated pink surface of the bar, took a bottle from the shelf behind him and poured with great meticulousness two thin streams of the pallid liquid until each glass was full to within one eighth of an inch of the brim. He replaced the bottle, took a couple of

steps along the bar, leant on it with one elbow and squinted carefully at the two glasses. He pursed his lips, and at last gave a quick nod of self-congratulation.

‘Two and sixpence,’ he said.

Roger took the glasses hastily back to the little round table in front of Fergus. Time was slipping by.

He sat down on the uncomfortable narrow bench.

‘Well, cheers,’ he said.

‘Cheers.’

Fergus took a tiny sip.

He put the glass back on the table and turned to Roger. With expectation.

‘I wanted to have a chat with you,’ Roger began.

Fergus turned his round face with the beaky little nose in the middle of it away. He concentrated on looking at his glass.

‘I’ve been trying to find out,’ Roger went on, ‘exactly what work it was that Eric Smith was doing at the time of his death.’

Fergus sat very still. It was difficult to see in the dimness of the bar but it looked as if a slow faint blush was suffusing the smooth face and creeping up to the point of the beaky nose.

Quickly Fergus took up the first glass of pale, pale amber liquid and plunged into it. The level fell and fell until the glass was emptied.

‘Eric Smith,’ Fergus said, choking slightly, ‘I’m afraid I can’t help you there. I knew nothing about the technical side of what went on at the School, you see. And in any case it’s a long time now since I was there. I’m just off to the United Nations, you know.’

Roger laid a hand on the fine tweed of Fergus’s quiet suit.

‘But not just for a few minutes,’ he said.

Fergus laughed. Rather shrilly.

'No, no,' he said. 'I meant in a month or so.'

He turned and looked full at Roger. Certainly his colour was higher. But then he had just drained a certain amount of sherry in a single gulp.

'In any case,' he said, 'I thought you wanted to tell me something. Not to ask me things.'

Roger shook his head, sadly.

'I'm afraid you must have got hold of the wrong end of the stick,' he said. 'I wanted to ask you about Eric. I understand you haven't completely broken off your contacts with the School.'

Fergus looked at his second glass of sherry. Roger took his eyes off him for an instant and glanced quickly at the door. No one.

'Oh, but I have,' Fergus said. 'I've left the School, you know. Left completely.'

'But you still call in,' said Roger implacably. 'I've seen you myself. What were you doing there?'

Fergus reached for his glass and sniffed at it hastily.

He smiled. With effort.

'I - I was just paying a visit there, I expect,' he said. 'I mean I have friends there. I was there a number of years, you know. What did you think I was doing?'

'I thought you might be keeping an eye on things,' said Roger.

Another quick glance at the door. Still all clear.

'I thought you might be interested in what people were doing. People like Eric, for instance.'

'No,' said Fergus sharply.

He took a little swig of sherry.

'No,' he said. 'I hadn't the least idea what Smith was doing.'

‘Oh come,’ Roger said, ‘you knew he was a psychologist, didn’t you?’

‘No.’

‘But surely that was simply common knowledge.’

‘Well, it wasn’t common knowledge to me. To tell you the truth I knew there was something slightly mysterious about both of you two, and I made a point of knowing nothing about either of you.’

‘Ah,’ said Roger, ‘you knew there was something mysterious about Eric and me. What was that?’

‘I tell you I know nothing about either of you. It was simply said to me by Professor O Nuallain when you were first appointed that there would be no need for inquiries about your backgrounds. And that was enough for me, quite enough.’

Roger took a sip of his sherry. It was very dry and light. It felt almost as if it would volatilize away if it was breathed on too heavily.

He leant back.

‘By the way,’ he said, ‘do you come to this bar often?’

Fergus looked at him suspiciously.

‘I’ve been here before,’ he said.

Grudgingly.

‘Then you can tell me. Is there a back way out through there where it says the telephone is?’

‘Yes. Yes, I think there is. Why?’

‘Oh, I was just wondering.’

Roger took another long sip of sherry. He looked over the top of his glass at the main door. Behind it he detected the black shape of a burly form surmounted by the smooth roundness of a bowler hat.

‘This is excellent sherry,’ he said.

Fergus looked at him cautiously.

'It suits my taste,' he admitted.

They each took a reverential sip.

The two men standing at the bar finished their confidential conversation.

'Great gas, great gas,' said the first.

'Then it's a deal, John,' the second said quickly.

'Ah, sure, it's a deal. Let's have a ball of malt to confirm it.'

'Ah, I'd like to, I'd like to. But duty calls, duty calls. I have to see himself before the Dail meets, the old chancer that he is.'

'Ah, you do, you do. Well, good luck so.'

'Good luck.'

They opened the glass-panelled door wide. The towering black pillar of respectability was standing solemnly directly outside.

Waiting.

Roger looked at the dark end of the bar where the notice pointed to the telephone.

A moment's calculation.

He turned to Fergus Peck again.

'We'll have another,' he said.

'No, no. Not for me, if you don't mind. I should be getting back to my office. There's a terrible amount of work to be done and I'm off to the United - Oh, but I think I mentioned that. But let me get you one.'

'No, thank you all the same,' Roger said. 'I think this will do me. I must be toddling myself in another moment or two.'

Fergus smiled.

'Well,' he said, 'it's been pleasant seeing you.'

'Yes,' said Roger.

He glanced at the door again. It looked as if the black form on the far side of it was gathering himself up for action.

Roger rose to his feet.

Fergus bounced up and began briskly putting on his coat.

Suddenly Roger sat down again.

‘There was one other thing I meant to ask you,’ he said.

Fergus looked down at him apprehensively.

‘Yes?’

‘Just how well do you know Bosenwite?’

Fergus’s mouth opened twice. A surprised fledgling.

There was a long silence.

Roger looked at the door. The watcher had his hand on it.

‘Bosenwite,’ said Fergus at last. ‘I don’t think I know anybody called that.’

‘Not Professor William Bosenwite, director of the Institute for Human Relations, Leeds?’

‘No. No, I’m certain I don’t know him.’

A declaration upon oath.

‘That’s funny,’ Roger said. ‘I thought someone told me that you had expressed a great admiration for him.’

He looked steadily at Fergus. He sensed that the bar door was slowly opening.

‘Well, I don’t know him. I don’t know him at all. And now, if you’ll excuse me, I must get back to my office.’

A distinct paddy.

Fergus almost ran towards the heavy swinging door. He reached it at the moment that the black pillar of respectability had definitely entered the bar. He brushed past him and pushed furiously at the door. He caught it at just the wrong moment as it was at the fastest point of its swing towards him. It threw him half off balance. With a

little shriek of anger he barged full at it and shot out into the street.

The pillar of respectability stood for a moment in amazement.

Roger seized his chance. He strode quickly towards the dark back of the bar where the dingy notice pointed to the telephone and escape.

He had taken only two steps when the diminutive figure of Collins and the floating bulk of the Bosun loomed up out of the gloom in front of him.

He swung round wildly and ran full tilt towards the still swinging main door. The pillar of respectability took half a pace forward and put out his arms in a gesture of entreaty. Roger ran past him. At the last moment the man made a clutch at his coat. But Roger had got to the door. He caught hold of its brass handle and swung violently round on it. His coat came free. With a wild jerk he hurtled out.

One or two passers-by looked curiously at him, but he dodged round them and set off at a good run into Grafton Street and away up towards Stephen's Green.

After a minute he looked over his shoulder. The Bosun, Collins and the tall man were in full pursuit. The little stable lad was dodging nimbly through the shoppers and seemed to be progressing faster than he was himself. The pillar of respectability was making a better showing than his rather feeble effort in O'Brien's Bar had indicated would be likely. But he was handicapped by a tendency to apologize to people for brushing past them. The Bosun slowed to a walk as Roger looked back and began shouting for a taxi.

Roger ran across the road as soon as he got to the Green and entered the big iron gates. There was enough cover in the various clumps of bushes in the big gardens to give some hope of dodging the nippy Collins, and it was always safer to neutralize the directing intelligence of the Bosun.

Cruising round the Green in a taxi he would be little help to his hirelings.

Roger ran as fast as he could towards the centre of the little park, looking from side to side for a patch of shrubbery where he could take cover. A fiercely throbbing stitch developed in his left side.

He slowed almost to a stop and, to give himself a moment's unwasted respite, turned round to see how far off his pursuers still were.

A shock of fear swept coldly over him. Less than twenty yards away running strongly towards him was the towering man in the long black coat. Clear of the buffeting of the crowds in the street he had put on a remarkable turn of speed. He ran with curious smoothness, holding himself very upright and scarcely moving his arms as if he had been put on wheels.

Roger was running hard again now. He realized that he could not hope to escape in the Green and headed for the high iron railings on the north side of the little park.

Adrenalin flooding the system.

He dared not look back but before he got half way to the small gate which he was aiming for he heard behind him the steady thudding of running feet. An implacable engine throb.

A renewed effort. The sharp pain of straining muscles all along the back of his legs. Something in his neck beating heavily.

Only a few yards to the gate now. The thudding feet behind him definitely louder.

A child, with a tricycle headed across his path at right angles. In front or behind? He would have to slow down if he was to let the boy get across.

At any instant he expected to feel a hand clutching at his flying coat.

He forced his legs to stride out a fraction harder. The child looking up from his handlebars in astonishment. And close behind the sound of the thumping feet breaking their implacable rhythm, skidding on the fine gravel over the asphalt.

And at last the narrow gate. And through. A scattering of people walking along the pavement on this quiet side of the square. Traffic in the street moderately light, checked by a clanking steam-roller bearing down towards him.

He jumped out into the road in front of it.

The risk of an accident. Perhaps the easiest way out. The hospital bed. Cool whiteness and safety. Out of it all.

Up on to the far pavement. The steam-roller thundering by.

A taxi came to a fast halt a little farther up the street. The air-filled mountain of the Bosun forcing his way out, thrusting a note at the driver between pink puffy fingers.

Running again. A penance. Forcing the body to act against the desire for utter rest. The power of the will.

He turned into Kildare Street. This time the Museum would be no refuge.

Keep running at all costs. Easy enough to outdistance the Bosun. But what if the man in the black coat had got across the road without having to wait for the traffic? The pavements were much less crowded than in Grafton Street. The infrequent visitors to the massive clubs. Only one man coming up the street.

A familiar figure.

Colonel Myles.

'Hello there, you seem to be in a devil of a hurry.'

To stop? Or to run past?

The peace of standing still.

Roger came to a halt in front of the erect figure of the colonel. Trim moustache, piercing eyes.

Roger puffing and snorting. His mouth unashamedly open.

'You seem to be a bit out of training. Young fellow like you.'

Roger with an effort closed his jutting lower lip and smiled.

'I had a notion that I could catch a bus if I ran as hard as I could,' he said.

Struggling not to gasp the words.

He smiled again.

'But I'm not really in that much of a hurry.'

He turned round. Slowly and easily.

At the corner the Bosun and the pillar of respectability. In conference. At a check.

That was the answer. To keep talking. Always to be in deep conversation with a respectable citizen. In a position where you could not be kidnapped without causing a lot of fuss.

'I was looking for you this morning as a matter of fact,' Colonel Myles said.

'Oh yes?'

'Yes, I have a little time to spare. I'm waiting for a document and there seems to be some delay. Slight failure in staff work. So I thought, if you wanted to know anything about Cromwellian Ireland from me, now would be the time.'

Unexpected salvation.

'That would suit me down to the ground.'

'Well, shall we step in here to my club? I was on my way round. There'll be no one about much at this hour. We can talk in comfort.'

At the corner the Bosun and his henchman appeared to have agreed on a plan. They set off purposefully towards

Roger and the colonel.

Roger relaxing. The pleasant pain of tired muscles.

‘That would suit me excellently,’ he said.

Up the steps to the club. The begrimed two-hundred-year-old walls. Impregnable.

The uniformed porter saluted the colonel smartly. The big door swung to behind them.

Safety.

Chapter Fifteen

Brown leather armchairs arranged in massive clumps all about the long high room. Growing in among them a scattering of spindly ashtrays on tall stands. At either end a wide fireplace in white marble streaked with fine dark grey lines. Above them two portraits, of men with calm expressions.

The enormous carpet was red with an aimless design in dark green. Under one of the tall windows there was a big oak table with journals arranged on it in much considered ranks – Irish newspapers on the extreme left, English newspapers next to them, next English periodicals, then Irish periodicals ranging from *The Irish Tatler* at the top to *Hermathena, A Series of Papers by Members of Trinity College, Dublin*, at the foot. And on the extreme right a rank of miscellaneous foreign journals.

The room was entirely deserted.

‘Ah good,’ said the colonel, ‘we can sit by the fire. I’m afraid I’m getting to the stage now where I begin to appreciate my comforts.’

He led Roger over to the two armchairs nearest the fire.

Roger relaxing as they approached the generous wall of heat emanating from the deeply glowing pulsating coals. A pause. Time to appraise the situation.

A rapid survey of the events of the morning. With depressing results. Certainly Fergus Peck had seemed embarrassed by questions about the Bosun. He had even lied about him. But did this really prove he was the Infiltrator? After all, George Wyndham had seemed almost

equally put out in a different way by talk about Eric. And Austin Boycott was as dangerously enigmatic as ever.

And even Etain ought still to be considered. He had meant to find an opportunity of asking her about her new record-player and he had missed his chance. What if she could provide no convincing explanation in spite of everything?

And there were other possibilities still virtually unexplored. Colonel Myles himself, for instance.

Roger turned to him as they sat down in front of the fire.

'You've been retired for some time now?' he asked quickly.

'Retired from the Army, yes. But I've only recently totally abandoned any sort of gainful work. Or, to be accurate, found that it has abandoned me.'

'What work was that?' Roger said.

The casual question.

'Oh, the usual sort of thing. Odd chores for the War House, you know. This and that.'

'And now you no longer work for them in any capacity?'

The piercing eyes looking straight at Roger.

'No,' the colonel said. 'Wish I did in many ways. When you've spent the best part of your life in the British Army you miss it.'

'But you enjoy living over here?'

'I do and I don't to be perfectly frank. Ireland's a very different place to what it was when I was a boy.'

'And you resent, to some extent, the changes?'

A shrewd look from the bright eyes.

'Ah, not in the way you think, I fancy. I don't think everywhere would be the better for British rule, you know.'

'But you must have done a fair bit of helping to uphold British rule in your time?'

The colonel touched his spruce grey moustache.

‘Well, I was in India and Palestine, certainly,’ he said. ‘But I was simply posted there, you know. I didn’t have any divine mission or anything.’

Roger sat forward in the big shiny brown leather armchair.

‘This interests me,’ he said. ‘You mean you were quite happy to go to such places and carry out British policy simply as a soldier, even though there was a certain parallel with the case of Ireland, where you are in favour of the so-called oppressed country?’

‘You find it hard to understand?’

‘I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to imply it was dreadfully immoral conduct or anything. It’s just that to me it’s an unusual way of looking at things.’

The cold grey winter light in the tall windows. The big empty room with the two cool portraits looking at each other calmly across the silence. And the sudden intimacy of the conversation. As if both participants realized that it was about something more than its outward form indicated.

The total seriousness of question and reply. Something at stake.

‘An unusual way of looking at things?’

The colonel leant back against the rubbed leather. Still sitting alertly.

‘Well,’ he said, ‘I suppose you can say that I look at things as a soldier. Soldiering has been in the family for generations, you know. I’ve a couple of nephews in the London Irish at this moment. The elder will inherit Brownstown, though I’m not sure that there will be much left to leave him. That’s what I meant when I said that Ireland was a very different place than it was forty or fifty years ago: it’s not a place that Brownstown fits into very well.’

He looked deeply at the glowing contorted coals. The shape of the future.

After a while Roger said:

'The soldier's way of looking at things. I think I see what you mean. Yours but to do and die, if that's not too much of a cliché. And I don't mind admitting that I envy you.'

Again the piercing glint of the eyes enmeshed in their network of fine lines.

'My simple certainties, eh? But you know what faith is, don't you?'

A quick look.

'Faith is, after all, no more than an attitude of mind. And the mind is a shifting sort of thing. Faith isn't that mantelpiece over there, a thing that exists and has to be physically knocked to pieces if it is to cease to exist. Faith is no more than what one happens to believe at any single moment. There's no guarantee that one is going to believe it at the next moment, even though one has believed it for all the moments of a lifetime.'

The door at the far end of the room opened and a portly white-haired man put his head round it. He looked for a moment at the two pairs of legs stretched out beside the pulsating fire.

He withdrew.

'All the same,' Roger said slowly, 'I noticed you used the present tense when you said you had the soldier's way of looking at things.'

'Yes. Yes, I did. And it's true that I still have, or if you like, up to this very moment I have had that way of seeing the world.'

A sharp laugh.

'And a pretty fool I suppose it makes me look. An ex-soldier, a finished soldier, who is incapable of doing anything else but go on being a soldier.'

Roger leant forward again. He looked at the colonel's weathered face with intensity.

‘Unless you are still doing your duty as it has come to you in orders, complete with instructions to deny that you are doing so,’ he said.

Colonel Myles sat a little further back in the big brown armchair. His bright eyes opened a fraction farther.

‘I don’t know what you’re talking about, I confess,’ he said.

Roger smiled.

‘Oh, just a hypothetical case. It occurred to me that with your philosophy of life you would be prepared to deny that you were acting as a soldier out of a soldierly sense of duty.’

‘Yes, I suppose I would be prepared to do that,’ said Colonel Myles. ‘Though it’s a complicated point of view.’

He looked at the floor. The piercing eyes seemed to be tracing the intricate pattern of the green on the red of the carpet, the tortuous lines on the simple background.

‘However,’ he said looking up and speaking more briskly, ‘luckily my concerns at the moment are no more complicated than the intractable history of Oliver Cromwell in Ireland.’

And they talked about Cromwell. They lunched together in the comfortable richness of the club dining room and returned to their brown leather armchairs by the glowing fire for coffee. Roger at times wondered whether when all this was at an end he would be able to remember anything the colonel had said.

But, he reflected, he was at least gaining a respite. The Bosun outside might be planning some new move, but the club was sacred ground. Ireland might not be what it had been forty years before, but a kidnapping from such a place as this would still be an impossibility.

He felt a sense of lassitude. He ought to be taking advantage of his temporary safety, but instead he was content to sit in front of the enormous fire and act as if the

Bosun had never come to Ireland to receive the Sir Patrick Dun Medal, as if Eric Smith had not died, as if the erect figure sitting beside him with the spruce grey strip of moustache and the piercing eyes might not be Eric's murderer.

But at last the subject of Cromwell's influence on Ireland appeared to be exhausted. Colonel Myles got briskly out of the great brown sea of his chair and rang the china bell-pull beside the mantelpiece.

'You'll take some tea, won't you?' he said.

'That would be very nice,' said Roger.

He looked out of the tall windows. The cold grey light had almost gone. Soon the early winter darkness would be complete. He seemed to feel the force of the chill wind.

A return to duty.

'But, look,' he added, 'I've taken up a terrible amount of your time. I mustn't keep you any longer.'

'Well,' the colonel said, 'I certainly intend to have tea. But if you've got affairs that take you elsewhere, don't let me keep you.'

The bright eyes twinkled. The network of fine lines wrinkling up.

'I seem to remember there was a bus that had to be caught rather urgently,' he said.

Roger was caught off balance.

'Oh,' he said. 'Oh, yes. I was in a hurry, wasn't I?'

'Where were you off to?'

The quiet question. The orderly room reputation for being able to detect the most plausible liar in the regiment.

Perhaps the question needed no answer. Perhaps the colonel knew very well why Roger had been running so fast down Kildare Street with his mouth wide open straining for

air and his legs pricking with protest at being forced to keep moving. Perhaps there had been no respite.

Perhaps the cats had been playing with the mouse.

Roger smiled.

The door opened and a manservant came into the room.

'Ah, splendid,' said the colonel. 'Tea, please.'

He turned to Roger.

'You are staying?'

Nothing else to do. No doubt the Bosun had taken the elementary precaution of leaving somebody to watch the club entrance, and he had no plan for outwitting them.

'If I may.'

'Then tea for two. Buttered toast and some of that very good plum cake.'

'Certainly, sir.'

The man left, closing the door discreetly.

An awkward silence.

Roger decided that the colonel was hardly likely to put his question again. Unless it was not a real question but the first teasing move in whatever the Bosun planned for him when he was captured. On the other hand, if this was simply a friendly meeting between two colleagues it would seem odd not to answer a simple, mildly bantering inquiry.

If.

The silence grew.

The colonel looked at the door as if there might be some dereliction of duty over the tea.

Suddenly Roger saw a way of killing two birds with one stone. He had been afraid that the Bosun might have set up a watch on his bank. Here was a way out.

'I say,' he said, 'you couldn't lend me by any chance a small sum? When I bumped into you this morning I was

chasing like mad to get to my bank. And I'm afraid I've missed it altogether now.'

'Bank?' said the colonel. 'I thought you said "bus".'

The reasonable reply of a mind used to spotting inconsistencies? Or the cat with the mouse?

'Bus it was,' said Roger. 'My bank is tucked away on the north side where I have a rather disreputable flat. I wanted to get there before lunch.'

The colonel said nothing. The moment of complete silence. What lay at the other end of it? A brutal accusation of lying?

The colonel put his hand to his inside pocket.

For an absurd instant Roger was convinced that he was going to bring it out holding a pistol. A sudden squall of cold rain beat against the windows of the great warm room.

But the colonel's hand when it emerged was clasping only a wallet. He opened it.

'Let me see. Hm, yes. I can spare five pounds, if that's any good to you.'

The prosaic tones.

A refinement of the teasing game? Was there a wallet in the pocket and a pistol in a holster under the tweed jacket? Had the colonel amused himself by making a cool choice?

'That's very kind of you, if you really can spare so much. I'll write you a cheque, if that's all right. Just in case I don't see you in the next day or two.'

'Are you going away somewhere then?'

'No.'

Not the properly mild tone for an answer.

Roger tried again.

'No, I'm not thinking of going away particularly. It's just that sometimes I prefer not to work at the School itself.'

He looked at the trimly erect figure standing in front of the great glowing fire.

‘It’s one of the penalties of my particular line of research,’ he said, ‘that I do occasionally have to visit other parts of Ireland. I’m not much of a traveller, I’m afraid. I like my comforts. But you, I suppose, escape all that?’

‘It would scarcely worry me in any case,’ Colonel Myles replied. ‘If you’ve been liable to move at more or less a moment’s notice for the greater part of your life, you learn how to do it without inconveniencing yourself.’

The question not exactly answered.

Roger took out his chequebook and began writing on the broad arm of the wide brown leather chair.

‘But now you no longer have to leave your home?’ he said.

Casually.

The colonel standing in front of the fire looking down at him.

‘Oh, I don’t know,’ he answered. ‘After all, Cromwell travelled over most of the British Isles. I occasionally feel the need to see some particular battle site or what not, you know.’

‘I suppose so. I hadn’t thought of that. Have you visited them all?’

‘By no means. Just the ones I’ve written about. I was at Marston Moor a few months ago, but I haven’t been anywhere else recently.’

‘Marston Moor? That’s in Yorkshire somewhere, isn’t it?’

‘Yes.’

The man returned with the tea. While he set it out Roger finished writing his cheque. He handed it to Colonel Myles.

‘Thank you, my dear fellow. Dratted nuisance these banks with their early closing hours and all that nonsense.’

A quick smile from under the spruce grey moustache.

‘You know a fellow called Boycott, Austin Boycott, who’s by way of being a colleague of ours?’

Roger looked up quickly.

‘Yes,’ he said.

The colonel gave a short bark of a laugh.

‘That’s the one point on which he and I agree,’ he said. ‘Reform of the banking system.’

Roger laughed.

‘Yes, he’s a bit of a firebrand, isn’t he?’ he said. ‘Do you know him well? I only met him properly for the first time a day or two ago, but I got treated to some pretty strong denunciations of this and that. I can’t remember whether the banks came into them or not.’

‘They probably did. He’s very hot on them. So am I, come to that. I think it’s my sole revolutionary opinion. But I wouldn’t say that the bond between us is so strong as to make us friends exactly. No, I regard him as an interesting chap to spend an hour yarning with once in a while. Did you know he is, as he puts it, in the pay of the British Government?’

Roger looked at the colonel in astonishment.

The kaleidoscope violently shaken. The new pattern.

‘Yes,’ said the colonel, ‘I thought that might surprise you. I found it hard to believe at first, but apparently it’s quite true.’

‘What is he being paid by them to do?’ Roger asked.

‘Oh, he was a little cagey over his exact duties. In fact I wouldn’t have believed him at all, only he happened to give me proof positive.’

‘Proof? What was that?’

‘Perfectly simple, my dear chap.’

The colonel paused. A twinkle of pleasure in the piercing eyes. The conjurer able to see the rabbit safely lurking in the hat.

‘He showed me a draft payable to him. A War Office draft. Had hundreds of them myself in my time.’

‘And he wouldn’t tell you what it was for?’

‘Oh yes, he did. He was only too ready to. He told me it was for spying.’

‘Spying? But I thought you said he was cagey.’

‘Ah, that’s the point.’

The colonel chuckled and took another piece of toast, limp and dripping with butter.

‘That’s the point: he told me with rather too much emphasis. You see, I’ve been able to detect two Boycotts. There’s Boycott the conspirator, and there’s Boycott the scholar. If you listen to him, you can tell quite easily where one is switched in and the other out. It’s really a question of how loud he talks. The conspirator practically shouts.’

Again Colonel Myles chuckled. Boycott as a rival hobby to Cromwell.

‘I can’t say I’ve noticed this,’ Roger said. ‘But then I think in my limited experience of him I’ve only met the conspirator.’

‘He’s a good deal more in evidence than the other chappie,’ Colonel Myles said.

The twinkling bright eyes.

‘So you didn’t believe him when he told you he was spying?’ Roger said.

‘Ah, it wasn’t that I necessarily completely disbelieved him. I think he has a private rule that there has to be a grain of truth in everything he says. But I didn’t take his claim at exactly its face value.’

‘So what do you think he was getting the money for?’

‘Do you know, I’ve given the matter considerable thought and I haven’t arrived at any satisfactory conclusion. It’s an interesting little problem. What could be described as spying that in real truth would earn money from the War Office, but that isn’t actually as bad as it sounds? I leave it to you.’

The colonel leant forward. He poured them both second cups of tea.

Chapter Sixteen

Masticating his second piece of rich plum cake, Roger arrived at a plan of action.

He finished the cake, modestly refused a third piece but accepted a third cup of tea. The man who had brought the tea things came in again to make up the fire and draw the curtains. The cold shut out.

Roger allowed himself to feel at ease.

When Colonel Myles had finished his third cup of tea Roger said:

‘I wonder if I might make a phone call before I leave?’

The colonel showed him where the telephone box was, humped into his British Warm and left. Roger quickly entered the booth. The Bosun’s watcher might realize the significance of the colonel leaving alone and attempt something.

Roger’s first thought was to get on to the R.S.P.C.A. and ask them to go and look after Cuchulain. But he decided to leave it for a little longer. If things went his way he would be able to go and get Cuchulain himself. Soon they might be having a long walk together to make up for this spell in prison.

He rang instead the School number. The call was taken by Miss Hogan. He asked if he might speak to Miss Bloom.

‘What name shall I say?’

The brisk question. The need for regularizing all incoming communications.

For a moment Roger was tempted to describe himself as Professor William Bosenwite. Would he get a conspiratorial answer? Only the sudden thought that it might be Etain who

would prove to be the conspirator stopped him. He said he was Mr Jones.

‘Is it a personal call?’ said Miss Hogan. ‘The staff are not expected to receive personal calls in office hours.’

Roger drew a deep breath.

‘Yes,’ he said, ‘it is a personal call, but it’s a very urgent matter, and I’d be glad if an exception could be made.’

‘I’ll see if she is in the office,’ Miss Hogan said.

A long pause.

Roger pictured the scene. Miss Hogan with her skinny hand neatly clasping the mouthpiece of the telephone and Etain opposite being put through a catechism about a nonexistent Mr Jones.

At last the dead silence at the other end of the line ceased and he heard clonking sounds as if the receiver was being handed from Miss Hogan to Etain.

‘Etain Bloom speaking.’

More than a trace of resentment.

‘Etain, listen, this is Roger. Sorry to have done that to you, but it was necessary. Now listen, I want your help. You’re due to finish work in a few minutes, aren’t you?’

‘In exactly seventeen minutes.’

Etain’s voice coming primly back. Roger imagined Miss Hogan glancing sharply at the clock.

‘Grand. Well, could you come straight round to Kildare Street. I’ve been spending the afternoon with Colonel Myles at his club –’

‘Daddy’s a member there.’

‘Good. Then you’ll know it. By the way, do I gather from your last remark that we are alone?’

‘We are. But I wouldn’t put it past somebody to be standing just outside the door. When I see you, incidentally, I’ve got something to tell you on that subject.’

‘All right. But listen now, outside the club there is probably someone, or perhaps several people, watching for me. Could you come in a taxi and just wait an instant right outside for me?’

‘I say, you’re going the whole hob, aren’t you?’

‘Yes, I am. I’ve just learnt something about Austin Boycott and I want to see him before the Bosun sees me. Do you have any idea where I could find him?’

‘Well, yes, I do as a matter of fact. Because he said something to me about it not half an hour ago. He’s gone to address a meeting.’

‘Hell, that doesn’t sound as if I’ll be able to get hold of him very easily. Where is this meeting? In O’Connell Street?’

Etain laughed.

‘Heavens no. It’s a tuppenny farthing little affair in a school hall somewhere.’

‘That sounds better. Where is it?’

‘Wait a minute till I think now.’

A wearisome pause.

‘No.’

‘No. What do you mean “no”? You haven’t forgotten?’

‘I have. But don’t worry at all. It’ll come back to me.’

‘Are you sure?’

‘Yes, really. Don’t you worry.’

A sudden change of tone.

‘Don’t you worry at all, Mr Jones. I have the key and I’ll be right over with it.’

She rang off.

Roger went and peered into the darkness from a little window beside the imposing front door. He had no difficulty in spotting the white-faced Collins, leaning against a lamp post hunched in his belted overcoat. He looked extremely

depressed. The pavement was damp from the intermittent rain.

If Collins had informed the Bosun that Colonel Myles had left the club, plainly no immediate attack was being planned.

Ten minutes later Roger saw through the slit of window a taxi turning into the street. As soon as it was plain that it was going to stop outside the club he swung open the big door and ran down the steps.

On the far side of the road Collins sprang to life. He waved his two arms violently and the familiar big black American car started up from where it had been parked farther up the street.

Collins ran across towards the taxi.

By this time Roger had reached the pavement and had seen with relief that the person in the back of the taxi was indeed Etain. She pushed the door open and Roger scrambled in.

'Rathmines as fast as you can,' Etain called out to the driver.

The taxi pulled away from the kerb.

Collins came running round behind it. He made a grab for the door handle. Roger shoved down the window, leant out and brought his forearm down hard on to Collins's hand. Collins lost his grip and staggered back to the pavement.

'Hey, what's going on?' the driver said.

He half turned in his seat and the taxi slowed down sharply.

'Never mind him,' Etain called out. 'He has drink taken. Get away.'

Coming towards them on the opposite side of the street was the Bosun's big black car. Roger saw that the Bosun himself was at the wheel.

He wondered feverishly what the big American car would do. Would the Bosun swerve across their path? And if he did what would be the reaction of their driver? He obviously had not much liked the incident with Collins and was unlikely to be ready to risk his vehicle in swinging clear. But he was accelerating pretty sharply now and they stood a reasonable chance of making a getaway.

The two vehicles approached each other. There was little other traffic in the street at that moment. The Bosun could be seen looking from side to side judging the space.

Roger held his breath.

And then the Bosun swung away to the far side of the road and they were past.

Roger flung himself round and peered out of the rear window to see what the Bosun was doing. The reason for his swinging on to the far side was immediately plain. He was making a quick U-turn and was going to come after them.

Etain sitting in a corner and looking bewildered took hold of Roger's sleeve.

'What is it?' she said.

'The Bosun, didn't you see him?'

'What, in that big car?'

'Yes, of course.'

'Is that him then? I've never seen him before.'

Roger turned to look at her closely in the gloom of the taxi. Surely this was the final proof that she at least was not the Infiltrator?

He relaxed against the leatherette of the seat.

'Why did you tell the man to go to Rathmines?' he said quietly to Etain.

'I had to say somewhere to make him get away quickly,' she answered.

Roger twisted round again and looked back. The Bosun had stopped his car and Collins was pelting up from behind to get in. No doubt the Bosun had calculated that the slight delay was worthwhile. If it came to a chase Collins was a good man to have at the wheel.

They swung round a corner.

Roger whipped round from the back window.

‘Stop, driver,’ he shouted. ‘Come on, Etain, quick as you can.’

‘But the lady said –’ the driver began.

‘Here’s a quid,’ said Roger.

He shoved his hand into his pocket and brought out one of Colonel Myles’s notes. The taxi pulled up with a squeal of brakes.

Roger tossed the note in the direction of the driver’s lap, wrenched open the door and tumbled out on to the pavement. Etain was out an instant after him. He grabbed hold of her hand and, dragging her behind him, ran into the darkness of the nearest doorway.

The taxi driver did not stop to give them as much as a glance. If people were going mad he was obviously going to get away as fast as he could. Especially with a pound note fluttering about somewhere on the car floor.

Roger, crouching in the doorway with Etain, watched the red light moving away. It was going at a fair speed when the Bosun’s car came swinging round the corner.

Had it got far enough away for it not to be obvious that the taxi had stopped? The Bosun’s car pulled expertly round the corner and gathered speed smoothly. Collins driving.

In a moment it had shot past Roger and Etain’s hiding place. Roger waited a few seconds watching the two sets of rear lights rapidly fading into the distance. Then they were obscured by a bunch of other cars.

‘This way,’ Roger said.

He marched Etain swiftly back on their tracks and round into Kildare Street again.

‘Well,’ Etain said, ‘you seem to have gone in for the adventurous life hook, line and barrel.’

Roger sighed.

‘I’m afraid I have,’ he said. ‘And I’ve got to go on with it. The first thing is to get over to my flat as quickly as possible. The Bosun was watching it and Cuchulain was inside. With any luck he’ll have withdrawn his men when they ran me to earth at the club. I want to get back there before he finds out he’s not chasing me.’

He hailed a cruising taxi in Nassau Street and bundled Etain into it.

‘Now,’ he said, ‘have you remembered where Austin Boycott’s meeting is?’

‘You sound as if you expected me not to have done,’ Etain said.

‘Well, haven’t you?’

‘Of course I have.’

The smile in her voice in the dark of the taxi.

‘That’s grand. Now, how do we get there?’

‘Not we,’ said Etain. ‘I’m awfully sorry but I promised Mammy and Daddy I’d have dinner at home tonight. And I think I must do it if I possibly can.’

‘Oh, all right. I suppose you must.’

Etain laughed.

‘What’s so funny?’

‘Only that you sound so disappointed.’

‘Well, what’s funny about that? I am disappointed.’

‘I know. It isn’t funny. It’s nice.’

Roger thought about this.

‘You can’t change your mind?’ he said.

‘Sorry, but they’d be awfully put out. It’s Daddy’s birthday.’

‘Oh, well then you must go. But can I ring you up later? I may have some good news.’

‘You surely can. And in your own voice if you like.’

Roger got the taxi to drive all the way along his street. It caused a certain amount of commotion among the barefoot urchins in the doorways, but there was no other excitement. It was clear that the Bosun had withdrawn his forces.

Cuchulain started barking like a mad thing as they came up the stairs. Roger let him out of his kennel room with caution, but he seemed no worse for imprisonment. He was in remarkably high spirits.

Etain stood up very well to having her face licked.

At last Roger managed to get the heavy leash attached to Cuchulain’s collar.

‘From now on,’ he said into the hairy ear, ‘you’re coming with me. I think we can be useful to each other.’

They all three walked to the bus stop where Etain had told him he could get a bus out to the school where Austin Boycott was addressing his meeting.

Etain gave him final directions and the bus loomed out of the traffic.

‘Heavens, I forgot,’ Etain said as she saw it.

‘Forgot what?’

‘About Miss Hogan, what I was going to tell you about her.’

The bus came to a halt. The three people standing in front of them made a rush towards it.

‘Tell me quick.’

Etain skipped beside him as he followed the three determined travellers.

‘She told me today that she’s come into money,’ she said.

Roger turned and looked at her.

‘Into money? Did she say how? How much is it?’

‘You’ll miss the bus. Austin Boycott may have left by the time you get there.’

Roger looked at the bus. The three eager passengers had boarded it in line abreast. There was always the possibility that Cuchulain would suddenly balk as he reached the platform. It had happened before.

‘Where did she get it?’ he asked urgently.

Abruptly the three passengers fell back. They were replaced from inside the bus by an enormously wide woman with a basket on either side of her like panniers on a donkey. If she was to get off everybody else would have to wait. The eager passengers backed and sidled down on to the pavement.

‘She wouldn’t say much about it,’ Etain said. ‘But I gathered it was quite a lot. Certainly more than the hundred pounds I got from Uncle Leo.’

‘So you did really -’

Roger bit back the rest of the sentence.

Etain smiled.

‘Did you think it was a bribe to me?’ she said. ‘You know, you could check on whether my Uncle Leo did die six months ago. It wouldn’t be inseparably difficult.’

Roger’s turn to smile.

The only sign that a public meeting was taking place at the St Peter’s Road School was that the iron gates leading into the dank asphalt playground were open. Roger went through them and stood for a moment in the wet darkness listening. Cuchulain lifted up his giant head and moved it about uneasily.

After a while Roger was able to make out a monotonous booming noise coming from a solid brick building to his left. He walked cautiously towards it in the dark. When he got to within a couple of yards of the wall he spotted an open door.

He took an extra turn of Cuchulain's leash round his wrist and stepped inside. At the end of what looked like a long corridor he spied a thin slit of light at floor level. The booming sound appeared to be coming from the same direction.

He set off in the inky blackness with Cuchulain going in front of him.

The faint tapping of the hardened pads of his claws on the linoleum.

Roger was just stretching out to find the door at the end of the corridor when there was a patter of clapping from behind it. It opened abruptly and three men in mackintoshes with hats pulled well down came out. Roger pulled Cuchulain aside as they hurried past.

He slipped into the schoolroom unnoticed in the flurry of their departure.

It was a bigish room with as many as fifty small inkgrimed desks lined up in long rows. On one side was a large window with two of its small leaded panes blocked up with blackened rags. In front of the desks there was a very small table over which Austin Boycott and a man with a fluffy white moustache, presumably the chairman, were huddled. The chairman was busily engaged in turning his notes over and over, no doubt anxious that Boycott should not see what he was going to say about him.

Behind the table was a large blackboard almost white from much use. On it somebody had written

But soon a wonder came to light,
Which showed the rogues they lied,

The man recovered of the bite,
The dog it was that died.

Roger read it and instinctively looked down at the long brownish grey back of Cuchulain, who was standing sniffing suspiciously at the smell of chalk dust and sour ink in the damp air.

Roger looked round the room.

Sitting scattered among the fifty desks there were five men and a woman. The only one of them who looked at all comfortable was George Wyndham. He was sitting lost in the exalted state to which any form of public meeting roused him.

Roger sat down quickly in the seat nearest the door. He tapped Cuchulain on the shoulder and the big wolfhound sank obediently down at his feet. He slipped off his leash and stuffed it in his pocket.

In a moment he understood why there was no great air of enthusiasm about the meeting. The seats were cruelly narrow and the bottom edge of the desks came very close to them cutting remorselessly into the flesh of the thighs.

The chairman put his hand up to his fluffy white moustache and coughed twice. The audience stirred in expectation. The chairman rose.

‘Ladies and gentlemen,’ he said, ‘I am sure you would all wish me to thank our distinguished visitor, Mr Boycott, for his address to us tonight. While many of us might not agree with his entire – er – disparagement of any form of – er – loyalty, I think we would all –’

He paused and looked proudly round at them.

‘... I think we would all defend to the last his right to – ahem – disparage.’

The woman member of the audience, who was wearing green tweeds and a cocked hat with a stubby brown feather in it, murmured, ‘Hear, hear.’

The chairman bobbed a sharp little bow at her across the ink-stained desks.

‘And now,’ he said, ‘I have no doubt there are many, many questions you would wish to ask Mr Boycott before I declare the meeting – ah – over.’

Austin Boycott modestly bowed his head and contemplated the little rickety table. The chairman turned his notes quickly over once more.

There was a long silence.

The chairman, who had sat down with an air of having finished a task well done, rose to his feet again. He sent a propitiatory smile out across the barren desks towards the woman in the green tweeds.

‘I’m sure Miss Martin has something ...’

Miss Martin got to her feet with a rolling motion as if her craft had just headed into a tidy bit of breeze.

‘Well, yes,’ she said, ‘there was something. It’s not perhaps strictly connected with this notion of loyalty being something – well, something bad, which Mr Boycott has been putting before us tonight. But it’s a thing I’ve been wanting to ask him for a long time. And this is it: does he really agree with exporting suffering horses to meet their deaths in agony in the abattoirs of the Continent?’

Chapter Seventeen

Austin Boycott popped to his feet. His shock of white hair seemed to bristle even higher. His narrow red T-shaped face took on a yet deeper hue.

But whatever fiery reply he was about to direct at Miss Martin was nipped in the bud by George Wyndham. At the mention of suffering horses he had manifested signs of considerable excitement, and as soon as the question had been put he rose to his feet holding his right hand high above his head.

‘Mr Chairman, Mr Chairman,’ he said, ‘may I be permitted to speak?’

The chairman blinked at him. After many and many an evening trying to wheedle people into oratory this was a request that must be savoured.

‘Mr Chairman,’ Wyndham said, ‘I have been deterred from putting any of the many questions that have occurred to me while listening to this really extraordinarily interesting meeting by the fact that I am not a member of this particular society – though I shall certainly join at the first possible opportunity – but now that the matter of the export of horses has come up, I feel I cannot sit in silence without informing you that I am an accredited member of the Home Counties Society for the Abolition of Trading in Horses.’

He pulled a bulging wallet from the inner pocket of the familiar striped blue jacket and began to sort through the wad of membership cards it contained.

He was watched in silence by the other people at the meeting. Even Austin Boycott, though still remaining standing, was for the moment nonplussed.

Wyndham abandoned his search.

‘Mr Chairman,’ he said, ‘I should like on behalf of my committee to bring you fraternal greetings on this auspicious occasion.’

He sat down.

Miss Martin began to clap. Softly, with gloved hands.

Austin Boycott banged his fist down on the tiny rickety table. It gave a sharp groan of protest.

‘Auspicious occasion,’ he boomed.

A noble stream of contempt rolling forward across the rows of battered little desks.

‘Oh, Mr Chairman, this occasion has been far, far from auspicious. I put before you a panacea for the tortured constrictions of this age. I urge you to cut through the tangle of hypocrisy that strangles every impulse for good in society today. I warn you that unless the debilitating notion of subservient loyalty to established forms and conventions is jettisoned lock, stock and barrel this country will never see an inch of advance in any field whatsoever. And what happens? Some wretched female, who ought to be publicly hanged as an example to her sisters, bleats to me about horses. Horses.’

He slumped back in his chair. Miss Martin slowly sank further into the rigorous embrace of her desk seat.

Austin Boycott gave her an apple sweet smile.

George Wyndham remained standing.

‘Mr Chairman,’ he said, ‘I feel it my duty clearly to indicate the views of the Home Counties Society for the Abolition of Trading in Horses on the statement we have just heard. Sir, I must retire from the meeting in protest.’

He buttoned the striped blue jacket firmly across his chest till the bulging books in the pockets stretched the stitching to its utmost. He settled his implacably circular hornrims

decidedly on the bridge of his nose. His Adam's apple bobbed. Once.

He marched out.

The chairman rubbed his hands together. The clash of intellectual debate.

The unexpected drama seemed to stimulate the remaining members of the audience to unheard of articulateness. They found a positive stream of questions to put to Austin Boycott. Each one was answered at length and with relish.

It was a full half hour later that at last silence settled on the big schoolroom like a layer of chalk dust.

The chairman rose eight inches out of his chair.

'Now,' he said, 'if that is the last question ...'

'Mr Chairman,' Roger said from his seat at the very back of the room.

The chairman pulled a hunter watch from his waistcoat pocket.

'Well,' he said, 'just time for a quick supplementary, I think.'

'Thank you,' Roger said. 'Then I should like to ask Mr Boycott this.'

At this point Austin Boycott recognized him. He bobbed his white shock of hair forward in a bow of greeting and smiled with sweetness.

'I should like to ask,' Roger went on, 'whether Mr Boycott carries his distrust of loyalty even to the point of advocating the refusal of loyalty to an employer paying just wages?'

Austin Boycott got to his feet. He smiled across at Roger.

'Yes,' he boomed, 'that is something I might well have dealt with.'

He swept a ferocious glare round the other members of his audience.

‘I hope you noticed the blatant assumptions lying hidden in the question,’ he said. ‘The putrid implication that there is some virtue in returning a due quantity of sweat in exchange for a due quantity of pelf. With – and notice this – the mandarins of society striking the terms of the bargain. No, sir, certainly there should be no loyalty to an employer’s grudging disbursements. Let us unite to strip away the unctuous cream spread to conceal the iron realities of commercial exploitation.’

He looked round the big dank room.

The audience looked back.

Roger decided that the time had come to move forward nearer Boycott to a place from which questions could not be avoided. He left his cramped seat and sauntered towards the front of the room. Cuchulain, he saw, was happily asleep on the chalky floorboards.

‘So you would advocate no loyalty to any employer whatsoever?’ he said mildly.

‘Certainly, not while society is in its present state of regressive torpor. No loyalty to any sum from any employer.’

‘You find you can carry out such a policy?’

For an instant Austin Boycott paused. Doubt how the matter had moved from the safely general to the personal.

Then he tossed back the shock of white hair and answered.

‘I carry out the policy to the last jot,’ he boomed. ‘I would scorn to do otherwise.’

Roger sat on top of one of the front row desks.

‘You have been a schoolmaster, haven’t you?’ he said. ‘Did you keep to your principles then?’

Austin Boycott smiled. He rubbed his tiny hands together briskly. Warming to the work.

‘Of course I did. Do you think that I would take their filthy money and loyally instil into the heads of poor innocent children the perverted doctrines that the established ones of the land wished to use to bolster up their rotten world? No, sir, I told them the truth of things. I did my best to corrupt their infant minds. And I’m proud of it.’

‘And the War Office,’ said Roger, ‘do you give them loyal service today?’

The elfin form of the barrel-chested agitator shook. A sudden cold wave hitting him and passing on.

He opened his mouth and gasped.

The moment of truth at last?

And from behind Roger there came the noise of feet trampling urgently down the dark corridor leading to the schoolroom. A confused sound of voices sharply demanding to know the right way. An invasion.

Everybody turned to see what was happening.

‘In here,’ came a voice.

Curt imperiousness.

Roger felt a wave of peevish irritation at such an interruption at the crucial moment. He guessed what had happened. Boycott in his speech must have dished out some remark or other insulting to the Church. No doubt the men in such a hurry to leave at the moment the speech was over had gone to gather a posse, perhaps even the Guards, to deal with a blasphemer.

Roger could not have been more wrong.

The first of the invaders to enter the schoolroom with brusque absence of ceremony was the Bosun. Draped in his startling black and white check topcoat and flourishing his ornate stick.

At his heels were Collins, white-faced as ever under the dome of oiled black hair, and the towering all-black figure of the pillar of respectability.

And in an instant Roger saw what must have happened. Etain had told the Bosun where to find him in a place where he could be seized with impunity.

The careless hand flips round the bulb of the hourglass. The utter reversal.

The caricature face suddenly seen from the other way up, the smile a frown. The optical illusion.

There could be no other explanation. Only Etain had known that he was going out to this obscure school to listen to Austin Boycott addressing an obscure society. He had completely thrown off the Bosun's pursuit. There could be no doubt about that. He had kept a sharp eye out at the flat and at the bus stop. There had been no watcher. He had taken the additional precaution of sitting in the back of the bus and it was perfectly clear that no other vehicle had followed its route. As a final check he had looked well behind him in the darkness as he approached the school. He had not been followed. So the Bosun had been tipped off by Etain.

He could hardly accustom himself to the thought. He had at last put his complete trust in her. Now white was black. He had to keep reminding himself of it.

He continued to lean against the front row desk where he had been putting his final question to Austin Boycott. He made no effort to get away.

In any case flight was out of the question. There was only one door to the room and the Bosun, Collins and the pillar of respectability stood at it in a solid immovable block. The window was set high in the wall and opened only at the top by means of cords and pulleys. He was cornered.

The chairman looked at this sudden influx to his meeting with patently mixed feelings. That it added fifty per cent to the size of the audience could not be denied. On the other

hand the occasion had been a moderate success already. Trouble of any sort now would be highly regrettable.

And one thing was plain about the Bosun and his companions. They were out to make trouble.

Roger turned and faced them. This could not be the end. Not when the Infiltrator had at last beyond doubt betrayed herself. If he could only get away he would snatch victory from defeat. Etain Bloom would see England sooner than she had bargained for.

He noticed that the Bosun seemed to have given up his dislike of meeting Austin Boycott. He was standing at the door looking at him with an expression of glee on his inflated balloon face.

It was enough to tell Roger that any idea of getting out of the room by keeping close to Boycott was not going to work. The Bosun must be prepared to risk any possible embarrassment in order to get hold of him as he had not been earlier on when he had apparently fled from his post outside the School at the sight of his former mentor.

The chairman realized at last the need for something to be said. The silence was growing difficult for everybody, except the intruders.

He coughed.

‘Well,’ he said, ‘I think that concludes our little meeting.’

He looked at the Bosun. The Bosun glared back.

‘I’m sorry to see,’ the chairman went on, ‘that some – er –, gentlemen seem to have arrived at the very moment that we were – ahem – terminating. But time and – er – tide wait for no man. I will just content myself with pointing out that our next meeting is at this same venue at the same time a fortnight today, that is at five o’clock – ahem – sharp.’

‘Just one moment, Mr Chairman.’

The Bosun’s insolent piping.

‘Just one moment. Are you going to be able to provide us with the distinguished Austin Boycott at your next meeting? That’s the point, you know.’

The chairman coughed. Apologetically.

‘Well – er – not exactly,’ he said.

The Bosun pounced.

‘Not exactly? He’s to be here and not here, is that it? Or what?’

‘Well, no. No, Mr Boycott will not be here. However, although I have not quite completed the – ahem – arrangements, you can be sure that a speaker of some eminence will – er – be here.’

‘But not Mr Boycott?’

‘No, not Mr Boycott.’

‘Well, that’s a great pity. Because you see I came all the way out here just to put a few questions to Mr Boycott. No doubt he has been talking to you about his distinguished ancestor –’

‘Distinguished?’

Austin Boycott’s infuriated boom.

‘Let me tell you, Professor Bosenwite, that the Charles Boycott from whom I am unhappy enough to be descended was as nasty a villain as you’ll find in all Irish history.’

‘Yes,’ said the Bosun happily, ‘I thought our views on the estimable gentleman might diverge.’

He pointed his ornate stick at Boycott as if it was a gun.

‘Tell me,’ he said, ‘did you know that Charles Boycott, far from being forced out of his agent’s post by the action of the local tenants, was simply promoted by his employer, Lord Erne, to a superior position?’

‘Nonsense,’ thundered Austin Boycott. ‘Even if you could prove that it happened at all, it would only have been a piece of blatant face-saving.’

The Bosun took a step forward into the room. A look of shining triumph on his puffy face.

‘But the arrangement had been made a clear six months before the tenants took their action,’ he said.

Roger leapt from his place and ran head down towards the small gap left by the Bosun when he had stepped forward to make his point.

But the Bosun was not so easy to outmanoeuvre. He turned calmly round and shoved Roger gently into the arms of the man in the long coat.

A grip like a black steel claw.

Roger twisted round and saw the Bosun’s face lit up by a little smirking grin.

‘Why, Mr Farrar,’ the Bosun said, ‘what an unexpected surprise. Come over to this corner and we’ll have an undisturbed chat.’

He led the way to the far corner of the room where a battered wire wastepaper basket leant drunkenly on its side. The man in the black coat marched Roger across after him. Collins followed, looking sharply up into the faces of the members of Austin Boycott’s audience.

Who pretended not to see what was happening.

‘Well,’ piped the Bosun, ‘good night, my dear Boycott. Just go and dig out the facts yourself.’

‘Drunk,’ Boycott boomed. ‘You must be drunk.’

The Bosun’s little eyes gleamed in their immense setting of winy flesh.

‘Yes,’ he said, ‘I’m drunk as a lord. Drunk and dangerous.’

He looked round the high schoolroom. Led by Miss Martin, the feather in her hat spry as ever, the meeting was fast dispersing. At the door Austin Boycott turned.

Roger opened his mouth to shout.

His tall captor swung him bodily round till he was facing the corner and at the same time clapped his free hand hard across his mouth.

‘Long live Boycott,’ shouted the Bosun.

His bewildered descendant turned and followed the others out.

A moment of silence.

The echo of the Bosun’s high-pitched shout dying away, the faint noise of the retreating audience.

And a new note.

A deep growling.

Cuchulain, disturbed at last from his slumbers by the piercing tone of the Bosun’s yell.

He rose inch by inch to his full height, topping the desks around him. He stretched briefly and suddenly saw Roger caught in the steel claw grip of his burly captor. He moved slowly across the room, his growl rising in intensity.

All four of them watched him.

As he got nearer and nearer the coarse hair stood up angrily on his back.

Suddenly Roger jerked his mouth wider open under the stifling grip of the man in the black coat and brought his teeth sharply down on to his middle finger.

The man gave a grunt of pain and relaxed his hand.

Roger pulled his head away and shouted.

‘Get him, boy, get him.’

The huge wolfhound gathered himself up to spring.

But for all the fierceness of his appearance he was no natural fighter. He had absorbed too much of his master’s willingness to think before acting.

A quality entirely absent from the Bosun’s character.

Cuchulain sprang full on to the point of the unsheathed swordstick.

An instant death.

The Bosun staggered heavily under the impact of the great dog's leap, but almost before Roger had realized what had happened Cuchulain was lying on the chalky schoolroom floor with dark blood seeping from the gashed wound at his throat.

With a wild plunge Roger broke out of the tall man's grip and flung himself on to the body of the dead wolfhound.

His hands feeling the still warm flesh under the rough brownish grey hair. His sobbed tears matting the springy coat.

The Bosun gently placed the bloody swordstick on one of the little desks. From the pocket of his startling black and white overcoat he took a small bottle with a stretched rubber cap and a hypodermic already fitted with a needle. He plunged the needle through the rubber and drew up half a syringe of liquid. He held the hypodermic briefly up to the light.

The faint yellow of its contents.

Stooping over the sobbing Roger he jerked back the right trouser leg and rammed the needle hard into the flesh of the calf.

Chapter Eighteen

Roger woke up.

The gradual sensation of returning consciousness. The head, the shoulders, the stomach, the arms, the hands, the fingers, the legs, the feet, down to the toes.

Cautiously he tried to move. He felt a little stiff but there seemed to be nothing else wrong.

He lay still for a moment putting together the events before he lost consciousness. One by one they came into his mind. Until the last one of them fell into place: the feel of the dead Cuchulain's rough coat under his fingers.

He breathed deeply, letting the air come out of his lungs in a long jet. Physically he felt nothing worse than the slight stiffness. But something still was wrong. Some part of his previous existence was missing.

He lay quietly thinking about what it could be. Time passed but he was unable to tell how much.

Then suddenly, for no particular reason, he realized what was wrong. It was totally black.

For a moment he thought that he had actually been blinded. The prick of sweat rising on the skin of his back.

He forced himself to be calm. There was nothing to be gained by panic.

He felt with extended palms at the surface on which he was lying. Stone. Damp, chill and uneven.

He slowly drew his knees up until the soles of his feet were firmly on the ground. Then inch by inch he heaved himself upwards. Unable to see anything he cringed at every moment expecting to hit some solid object. But at last

he was standing erect. He held out his arms wide to balance himself.

He stood in this position for a long time. Waiting until he felt a basis of reassurance. Forcing himself not to think.

Then he began painstakingly to turn round. This was the first action he had decided on: to complete one turn of three hundred and sixty degrees.

It was when he had turned through a hundred and twenty degrees that it impinged on his mind.

The immediate impact made him stop in his slow circular progress and stay stock still. It required a sustained effort of the intellect to work out the simple train of reasoning. I see something, therefore I am capable of seeing, therefore I am not blind.

The instant he had toiled to this point he realized what it was he was looking at: the merest chink of dim light extending for about four inches horizontally at a height of about five feet from the stone surface on which he was standing. He set out towards it, moving clumsily in the thick darkness.

Just as he was stretching out a hand towards it his shins barked against some hard object and he stumbled helplessly forward. He struck his head against what appeared to be a wall in front of him and ended up twisted and sprawled back on the damp stone floor.

But after this his exploration was swifter and more effective. He got to his feet again, feeling out all about him with outstretched fingers. Soon he located the object over which he had stumbled: a low stone bench or shelf. And above it a few moments later his searching fingers feeling over the brick wall came into contact with a different material. He touched it rapidly all over and was able to assure himself with a sense of triumph that somewhere about four feet above the stone bench there was a patch of

boarding, fixed closely together but at one point admitting a muted gleam of light.

It seemed that he was in a cellar with a single squat boarded-up window high up on one wall.

Bit by bit he carried out further explorations. He discovered that most of his clothes had gone. He was dressed only in vest and trousers. He confirmed his suspicion that he was imprisoned by making a complete circuit of the pitch black cellar. As far as he could discover it was a small squarish place about eight feet by eight. He located the door, which was totally immovable and let through not a gleam of light. There was no furniture except for the stone bench running along the whole of the wall under the blocked window and a chemical lavatory in one corner.

It was dank and chill.

When he had completed his explorations he made his way to the bench and sat down heavily. He felt entirely exhausted. For a long time he sat without moving. He felt too tired to think and there was little enough to think about. He did not know where he was, he did not know how long he had been there, he had no idea how long the Bosun intended him to remain like this, or what he intended to do eventually.

What seemed like hours passed, although every now and again he was assailed with a sharp fear that in fact only a few minutes had gone by. If they had felt so interminable how was he going to endure a long imprisonment?

There was no way of telling the time. His watch had gone with his clothes. For long spells he tried counting out the seconds. In this way he proved to himself that several periods of ten minutes had passed. But soon he found he had muddled himself up over how many of these spells he had recorded. There was no way of checking. At last he gave up all attempt to keep the time.

He tried thinking about his experiences since he had found Eric's body slumped in the big armchair in his flat. But recalling events which seemed to bear no relation to his immediate situation gave him an overwhelming sensation of pointlessness and after a while he made a deliberate effort not to think of them any more so as to keep the waves of despair at bay.

He dozed occasionally, and each time he did so awoke to find that he had momentarily lost all sense of place. Each time he reconstructed his surroundings with painful care.

For a short spell he banged monotonously on the door. He even shouted for help. But he knew before he began that the Bosun would hardly have put him in a place where he had only to make a little noise to attract attention.

At last an event broke the black silence all around him. Without the least warning the door suddenly grated open. Roger looked wildly towards the point from which the sound had come. He thought he detected a grey patch in the blackness and even the vague silhouette of a figure.

He leapt up and started forwards. But the long hours of sitting in apathy had deadened his responses. He stumbled and fell from sheer feebleness.

When he scrambled to his feet again the darkness was total once more. He stood for a long time without moving, staring at the place where he thought he had seen the grey oblong that indicated the door was open. Had it meant that? Had he imagined the whole incident? Or dreamt it?

It was much later when he was making yet another aimless exploration of his cell that he knocked against a tin pannikin on the floor somewhere near the door. He got down on his hands and knees and discovered that the floor was definitely wet rather than just slimily damp.

He reconstructed what must have happened. Painfully working through the puzzle. The pannikin must have

contained drinking water. He felt in it with minute carefulness. Yes, there was a dribble of cold liquid in it still. Obviously he had spilt the rest when he had accidentally discovered the little pan.

Suddenly he felt obsessedly thirsty. He put the pannikin to his lips and sucked up every drop of water in it. Still he felt his thirst unassuaged.

After a while he could bear it no longer. He knelt on the stone floor again and began licking at the little puddle where the pannikin had been. The water tasted dusty and bitter. He thought it must be thick with coal dust.

Towards the end of his dog-like scavenging he bumped into a second pannikin. He was luckier this time and did not upset it.

Holding the flattish metal dish with extreme care he sat cross-legged on the damp floor and put a finger in it to see what it held. He discovered some thick stuff, about the consistency of cold porridge. He scooped a bit up on the end of his finger and cautiously put it in his mouth. It was obviously food of some sort, but it had scarcely any flavour and without being able to see it he was totally unable to tell what it was.

The feel of it on his tongue made him hungry and he scooped out the contents of the pannikin and shovelled them greedily into his mouth with his cupped hand. After this he went back to the stone bench, which was drier than the floor if no warmer, and slept for a little.

After what seemed a shorter time than before he heard the door grate open again. He was lying on the bench dozing but managed to get up and get across the floor more quickly than on the first occasion. As he reached the door a hand pushed him hard backwards. He fell over.

‘Who’s there? Who is it? Who are you?’ he shouted.

The door had closed again.

With more care than before he explored the area of the floor near the door and came across two pannikins, one filled with water and the other with the same anonymous food.

He felt less hungry than when he had first been fed and decided to conserve part of his supplies to spin out the time till the next visit. He drank some of the water and carried the tin dish back to the bench. Then he went and fetched the food. When he had put it safely beside the water he made a fresh systematic exploration of his cell. He located the first water pannikin where it had slid into a corner, but he could not find the slightly greasy food dish. He thought he had left it near the door; doubtless the person who had brought the new supplies had succeeded in getting hold of it and had taken it away.

He judged by his state of hunger that he was now to get fed at least at fairly frequent intervals. He settled down with unexpected contentedness to wait for the next delivery of supplies. He decided that he would not attempt to rush the door when it opened. Instead he would sit quietly where he was on the bench and do his best to see who it was who came in.

The hours went by. The waiting time seemed to get longer and longer. He convinced himself more than once that the door was about to be opened, but there came not the slightest sound. He finished his supply of water and pappy food. Still nothing happened. He suddenly felt hungry and in a very short time was almost mad with the need to eat.

So when at last the door was opened he forgot all his calm resolutions about carefully observing his gaoler. He made a wild rush towards the dim figure and was again contemptuously pushed over on to the slimy stone floor. He ate all the new supply of food ravenously and with shame.

The interval before a third meal arrived was again terribly long and again Roger's patience was exhausted before it

arrived. But the next time he was taken unawares after a very short interval. And another meal came hard on the heels of this one.

At one stage Roger had entertained an idea of measuring time by the number of meals that he received. But this system of utterly irregular and capricious delivery only made him even more confused. All he could be sure of was that several days must have passed. It might have been two. It might have been five. He was totally uncertain.

Some facts he did discover with the passing of time. He was eventually able to make out that he had two gaolers and that they were Collins and the towering man in black. But their turns on and off duty seemed to form no recognizable pattern. Another possible clock had to be written off.

Never in any circumstances did either of them take any notice of him whatsoever. After he had shouted at Collins by name they ceased to take precautions to stop him recognizing them, but they never otherwise acknowledged his existence.

He became eaten up with self-pity. He was miserably cold in the dampness of the cellar with so few clothes. His beard had grown uncomfortably long. He smelt. The unvarying pappy food did not agree with him. He was able to sleep only in short spells before he was woken by painful stomach cramps.

As time went by he ceased to speculate in any way about his fate. He simply accepted that he would live for ever in this timeless, chill and pitch dark vacuum.

Occasionally he mused for long periods, hours or perhaps even days, on two sorts of events in his past. Nothing else from his former existence came into his mind, but these two trains of thought had for him the distant vividness of scenes remembered from works of fiction.

In the first he took long imaginary walks with Cuchulain, walks they had once taken together but transformed now into a sort of poetry. The Dublin streets through which they went became a paradisaal landscape, pure and unchangeable. Tirelessly he roamed through them with the big dog moving ahead of him at the end of his familiar leash. Endless vistas opened out ahead of them as they came to each new corner and closed quietly behind them as they passed. They had no destination and needed none.

In the second sort of reverie he found himself remembering in immense detail trivial conversations he had had with Professor O Nuallain in the days when they had both been working at the School. No one else ever figured in these long, intense periods of recollection – only himself and the prophetic eyes of his former chief.

The actual words they had each spoken were drably platitudinous – observations about the weather, banally polite comments on the news of the day. But in Roger's mind now they took on an intense quality as if every syllable had been thought out and destined for no other place than those they had occupied in the pattern of the whole.

He would fix on some minor point and brood over every aspect of it. One day, he recalled, Professor O Nuallain had said something to him about a scheme to grow vegetables on land cleared of peat for the new power stations. The professor had said it sounded a good idea. And this was now enough for Roger. The scheme, whether it was only a proposal or whether it had been begun he never knew, took on for him all the glory of a great enterprise. He savoured it, he worked over it, he became lost in it.

And suddenly, quite without warning as usual, the door of his cell was opened and instead of leaving him his unvarying food his two gaolers came across to the bench where he had been lying.

Without a word the big man caught hold of him by the right arm, lifted him impersonally to his feet and moved him towards the door.

A light piece of furniture.

Collins hovered on his other side waiting to seize his left arm in case of need. But there was no need: Roger was far too dazed to act in any way.

He allowed himself to be propelled through the door which he had thought he might never see the far side of. He lacked the capacity even to register that events were at last breaking up the unmarked continuum of his existence.

Outside the cell he dimly apprehended that there was a passageway. At the end of it Collins scuttered up a short flight of steps, took a big iron key out of his pocket and unlocked a door facing them.

A blast of undimmed electric light hit Roger between his eyes. He shut them tight and lowered his head in pain, but the light seemed to burn redly right into the centre of his head. He twisted and turned in the unflexing grip of his gaoler but nothing he could do diminished the fierceness of the inescapable light.

It was several minutes later that he realized he had been sat on a chair, strangely soft after the unyielding chill of his prison bench, and that he was no longer being held. He kept his eyes firmly shut and his head lowered and listened hard. The impact of the light hurt a little less now and he was able to concentrate on analysing his new situation.

The first thing that registered was a definite impression that his gaolers had left him. He shifted slightly in his seat and confirmed that his body came in contact with no watcher. In making these explorations he became aware too that he was sitting in a small low armchair covered in what seemed to be wonderfully soft and warm material. And there was something else.

He worked hard for a little attempting to isolate this decidedly new factor. And at last he got it. Warmth. The air all about him was warm. Warm, dry and comforting.

He allowed himself to lean against the back of the chair and relax. This was perfect ease. He had long ago ceased to feel hunger, though his pappy meals were often long delayed. Food was no longer something missed, but his deprived senses could luxuriate to the full in the warmth which had been absent for so long. Even the shooting pains in his stomach seemed less virulent in this new peaceful atmosphere.

He sat for some time slumped against the yielding back of the soft chair. Then he realized that the light was no longer hitting so hard at the surface of his eyelids. It had become tolerable. It suddenly came to him that if he were to open his eyes he would for the first time for weeks, perhaps months, be able to see clearly. There would be colours to distinguish.

The full sense of what he had been deprived of struck him, it seemed, for the first time. He had lived for a period without having been able to see enough even for half a second to know the colours of his surroundings. The thought of all the vividness that awaited him the moment he chose to open his eyes lay before him like a rich inheritance.

He sat forward a little savouring the prospect. He raised his head slowly. But in this position the light once again began to trouble him. He decided that his first sight of something with colour in it should be of the floor at his feet. With his attention directed to the floor he realized for the first time that his feet were resting on a carpet.

He wriggled his toes and felt the soft fibres. He could feel too the warmth beginning to make his chilled feet tingle. He moved them an inch or two back and forward over the smooth, warm surface.

And now he felt ready. He was going to open his eyes. To see colour.

Black on white. A jazzy pattern. He felt quietly pleased that he had been able to name the two elements. That this sense impression had meant something to his mind. Black and white. He was looking at a white carpet with a black design on it.

For a long time this was enough. It was the limit of his capability of apprehending. Then slowly he became aware of what was bounding the smooth area of warm wool. The two dull greyish areas on either side. His feet. The dead whitish flesh grimed over. One or two red caked places standing out where sores had formed.

The contrast between the colourless grime of the two feet and the rich, clean warmth of the carpet flooded into his mind with an overwhelming sense of pity. He made no attempt to analyse why his feet should have got into such a state or what the smooth carpet, on which they were resting like monsters from an alien world, meant. He simply allowed the contrast to dwell in his mind to the exclusion of everything else.

Heavy tears dropped from his eyes to the floor below. Dark patches on the clean dryness of the white carpet.

And at last peace. A long silence. The unaccountable feeling that the captors had withdrawn. The soothing effect of the warmth.

Roger decided that in a few minutes he would lift up his head and take a slow survey of the whole room. A weighty determination. A new career.

Time passed while he gathered up his resolution. He made one false start, and found that he temporarily lacked the sheer courage necessary to cope with even one new sight. But at last he was completely ready. He lifted up his head and looked steadily straight in front of him.

Sitting in a similar low armchair between three and four feet away, a picture of quiet ease and contented patience, was the Bosun.

Chapter Nineteen

Roger blinked.

He felt a small spurt of anger. The darkness yielding. A compass point in the void. Here at last was the person responsible. The Bosun.

Roger tried to stand up. He found he totally lacked the strength.

He felt pettishly aggrieved.

'At least you might tell me where I am,' he said.

The Bosun sat without moving. The inflated figure stuffing out the low armchair. The unbuttoned trouser top. The expression of distant contentment on the blown-up face.

'Look here,' Roger said, 'you kidnap me, you imprison me in a filthy dark cellar, and then you sit there and say nothing when I ask for an explanation. I won't stand for it. Answer me. Where am I?'

Again he tried to get up and go over to the Bosun. He would squeeze an answer out of him.

And again he found he was incapable of getting to his feet.

'Where am I? Tell me.'

An ineffective snarl.

The Bosun felt in his pocket. From it he produced a nail file. He began cleaning his nails. The pale pink nails at the end of the puffy fingers.

Roger took a deep breath. Then slowly and carefully he stood up.

He took a step forward. It did not bring him as near the Bosun as he expected.

The crash as he slumped back on to his chair.

A new surge of puling anger.

'I demand to know how long it is I have been here.'

And his voice sounded much less loud than he had meant it to.

The Bosun shifted in his chair so that he was no longer even looking in Roger's direction.

'I want to know what the idea is,' Roger said.

A tinge of pleading.

'Please,' he said, 'will you please tell me what all this is about?'

Without turning round in the low armchair the Bosun spoke.

'How many rocket bases have the Russians got?' he said.

The question descended on Roger like a thick blanket. Suffocating. Oppressive. Defying any effort to get to grips with it.

A sense of complete bafflement.

He sat in silence.

'No idea?' said the Bosun.

The irritating, piping voice.

'I -' Roger began.

He felt too tired to go on.

'Come,' the Bosun said, 'you must have some notion. Would you say it was as few as two? As many as two hundred?'

'Look, I don't care about Russian rocket bases. I want to know what you're up to.'

'I think you ought to care about the Russians, you know. Let us just establish the strength of their rocket armament first, shall we? Now, two bases. Yes or no?'

Roger shook his head.

'I don't know. I suppose more than two.'

'Ah, we're beginning to establish something. Now, have they got as many as two hundred?'

'I don't know. And I don't care.'

'Come, of course you know whether they have two hundred rocket bases or not. Do you think they do have two hundred?'

'No, I don't.'

The despair of utter fatigue.

'Good. Now we're getting somewhere. Not as few as two, not as many as two hundred. Let's take the top figure first. Not two hundred, you say. Do you think they have one hundred?'

'I tell you I don't know. I'm not a defence expert. I can't possibly be expected to know a thing like that.'

The Bosun turned round in his chair. The bloated body moving with unlikely ease.

'You tell me you are not a defence expert,' he said. 'You seek to convince me of that. You won't get away with it.'

Roger felt a new wave of bewilderment.

'But you know I'm not a defence expert.'

A bleat.

'You certainly appear to be trying to conceal even the rudiments of knowledge about defence,' the Bosun said. 'Come now, don't pretend to me that you couldn't tell me to within two or three bases the exact rocket strength of the Soviet Union. Come now, a figure if you please.'

'I do not know.'

'That won't do, I'm afraid. You know and I mean to find out just how far your knowledge goes. Now, listen to me. If the West has twenty bases and the Russians have forty, you can see at once, can you not, that we have to even up the balance somehow?'

Roger did not answer.

The Bosun turned away and began working the tip of the nail file round his nails again.

‘Let’s get back to basic figures,’ he said. ‘Now, what would you say was the likely number of rocket bases the Russians have?’

‘Forty.’

‘Ah, splendid. I see you are beginning to show some sense. Forty bases. Of course you knew all the time.’

A sudden onset of stomach cramps.

Roger bent forward in his chair. His sallow face whitening. His head began to thud.

Forty bases. Had he known? Was that a figure everybody knew? It was so long since he had seen a newspaper. Where had the figure forty come into his mind from?

‘Let us go on to the matter of nuclear bombs,’ the Bosun said. ‘Now, how many test nuclear explosions have there been since 1945?’

‘How can you expect me to know that?’

‘My dear chap, I see no reason why not. This is your subject, isn’t it? I hope you’re not going to try to pretend that nuclear bombs have nothing to do with defence.’

‘I don’t know anything about nuclear bombs.’

The Bosun swung back to face Roger. An expression of fury on his obese face.

‘Pull yourself together,’ he shouted. ‘Just think who you are and who I am. You can’t pretend to me, to me, that you know nothing about defence. You seem to forget: I know you. I know all about you. Now, stop pretending and answer my questions. How many nuclear tests since 1945? Answer up.’

Roger shut his eyes.

He had to think. There was something that had to be worked out. Something that had been said to him had to be dealt with.

The steady thudding in his head. An inability to concentrate.

And a high, piping voice boring at him from outside.

'How many nuclear tests? How many? Come on, I want the answer. How many nuclear tests since 1945? Come on, you've studied defence for years, you must know the answer to a basic question like this. How many? How many tests?'

'I don't know.'

'All right, we'll have to resort to infant school methods again. As many as a thousand? As few as five?'

'I just don't know.'

'As few as five?'

'No.'

'A thousand?'

'I don't suppose so.'

'A thousand? Yes or no?'

'No, no, no.'

'Would it surprise you if I suggested the figure of 326?'

'I don't know.'

'You don't even know whether a figure I suggest would surprise you or not? Come, that isn't good enough. Would it surprise you?'

Roger looked round the room. A blur.

The colour of the walls? Too hard to say. The door, where was it?

Blank despair. Blankness.

'How many nuclear tests since 1945?'

The snapped question.

‘Three hundred and twenty-six.’

Roger heard his own voice saying the number.

Was it something that the Bosun had said? It was too much of an effort to work out. Perhaps he had read it somewhere.

Or perhaps he knew it. Perhaps he had had a breakdown. Was his life as a linguist simply an imagined existence?

It was possible.

The patch of sweat on the inside of his thighs.

‘Look,’ he said, ‘I know you. Your name is Bosenwite. You are Professor William Bosenwite. I want you to tell me one thing. What has happened to me? Have I been ill?’

The Bosun looking down at his faultlessly manicured nails.

Roger brought out the ultimate question at last.

In a whisper.

‘Who am I?’

No answer.

The tip of the file probing at the corner of the podgy pink right thumb.

The long silence.

Roger watching the probing thin silvery file.

‘Now, there’s another aspect of the matter I want to hear from you about.’

Softly the piping voice.

‘The other end of the scale, shall we say? You know that a nuclear explosion can make people go blind?’

‘I suppose so.’

‘And that it can cause deafness?’

‘I suppose it can.’

‘That it can cause sterility?’

‘I dare say it does.’

‘And boils?’

‘What’s that to me?’

The sudden prick of boiling anger.

The Bosun began to file his thumbnail. The grating sound of the ridged steel powdering away the nail.

It stopped.

‘And there is a high incidence of deformed children after an explosion?’

‘That’s common knowledge.’

The grating sound began again.

‘About these boils cases, have you any idea how widely spread they are?’

‘No.’

Sharp denial.

The nail filing stopped.

Another series of questions about the effects of nuclear explosions. Water contamination, blast injuries, area of fallout, use of Geiger counters.

Roger’s answers, perfunctory, automatic.

The Bosun began filing the thumb of the left hand.

‘Did you know that the boils produced as an after effect of a nuclear bomb are particularly large?’

‘I know nothing whatsoever about them. Nothing.’

A shout.

‘And that they last a great while?’

‘I tell you I know nothing about them.’

The grating, irritating sound of the file.

It stopped.

More questions about hydrogen bombs. Not difficult to answer. The relief to the nerves of the silence as the file remained suspended above the next finger.

Roger lost count of time. The questioning process went on interminably, harking back again and again to the effects of

boils produced by nuclear explosions. And each time the noise of nail filing, plucking at the raw nerves obsessingly.

At last a pause. How many hours had passed?

The Bosun still sat comfortably in his armchair. Opposite him in his similar chair Roger twisted and turned. The material covering the seat seemed impossibly hot and rough.

And the nail file unexpectedly at work again in the silence.

‘Stop that.’

Roger’s scream.

The Bosun stopped.

‘Now,’ he said, ‘we mustn’t waste time. Tell me, please, how you would propose to defend British civilization. Would you be content with what methods we have got, or would you search for anything new?’

Roger’s right hand moving in front of him in a groping gesture.

‘I begin to see it,’ he said. ‘You’re trying to persuade me to come back to that place. I know you now. And I won’t do it.’

‘I take it that means you would favour the minimal use of weapons?’

Silence.

‘Answer yes or no.’

Roger passed his hand across his forehead.

‘There’s some sort of trick in this, but I’m so tired I can’t see it.’

‘Yes or no? More methods of defence or not?’

‘Oh, more I suppose.’

‘More. Right, do you believe the Russians would hesitate to develop any promising method of war?’

‘No.’

Sullen resignation.

'Do you think we should deliberately lag behind them?'

'I suppose not. I don't know.'

'Should we?'

'All right. No, we shouldn't.'

The Bosun drew the nail file slowly along its full length against the nail of his right-hand ring finger.

'Do you like scampi?'

The turbulence in Roger's head.

Scampi. Scampi. Something wrong about scampi. His mind chasing the question. Round and round. Tiring and tiring.

'Do you believe the Russians bar any method of war?'

Roger seized on the question eagerly. A straight path. Relief from the wild circling thoughts and half-thoughts.

'No, no,' he said. 'No, I don't believe they would. Yes, I'm sure of that.'

'Do you think they would carry through such methods to the end?'

The straightforward way ahead.

'Yes, I think they probably would.'

'Probably?'

'Almost certainly, if you like.'

'And should we balk at using the same methods?'

'I suppose not.'

'Aren't you sure?'

'No. No, I'm still not sure.'

'When did you last get your hair cut?'

And again the accompanying scrape, scrape, scrape of the file.

Hair, hair, hair. Roger's brain toiled after the whirling thought. Something hateful about hair. What is it?

Something wrong with hair. The brain flagging in the chase. The impossible request.

He sat upright in the low chair with his legs jutting out in front of him. The knotted muscles of the calves. The hands gripping the thighs. The corded neck.

His eyes were wide and staringly open. His breath coming in faster and faster gasps. A fine sweat sprang out all over his tense frame.

He toppled forward like a statue knocked carelessly from its perch.

Oblivion.

And the balloon figure of the Bosun kneeling at his side. The pudgy fingers feeling for his wrist. The piping voice lowered to a soothing whisper.

‘My dear chap, you’ve had some sort of a collapse. I’m frightfully sorry. I had no idea my arguments were worrying you to such an extent. I can see I must lay off.’

Roger lying askew on the floor looked up at him with slowly blinking eyes.

‘Do you feel a bit better now? I’m afraid you were right out for quite some time. Could you sit up again?’

Roger put out a hand and pressed himself up into a half-sitting position. The Bosun tucked an arm round his shoulders and helped him up. He fell back in the low armchair. Gladly.

The Bosun walked over and sat down in his own chair.

‘Now,’ he said, ‘we must think what we should do about you. You seem to be in a pretty bad way. I hadn’t realized it. Still, there’s nothing that we can’t sort out. Suppose you tell me just what your feelings were when you collapsed like that.’

Roger felt a colossal lassitude.

‘Oh, I don’t know,’ he said dreamily. ‘I suppose it all got too much for me. That’s all.’

‘What got too much for you exactly?’

The mild inquiry.

‘Oh, everything. That cellar, I thought I was going to spend the rest of my life there. And I didn’t really much care whether I did or not.’

‘Why not?’

The gentle tweak.

‘Etain, I suppose. When I found out she was your spy at the School it all seemed so futile. I thought I was in love with her. I saw all sorts of new things happening in my life. I felt like something emerging from a chrysalis. I’d been dormant and suddenly when I thought it was too late I felt the pulse of life again. Etain. And then it had to be her who was your agent, who killed Eric for you.’

‘Etain Bloom, ah, yes. Tell me more about her.’

‘There isn’t much more to tell. I was a fool to risk letting myself go with her. I knew she might be unsafe. After all, the secretaries were your best chance: I knew that. And gradually I gave her my complete trust.’

‘Until?’

‘Why, until she tipped you off that I was at Boycott’s meeting. If you’d wanted to keep her identity secret that was a mistake. She was the only person who knew where I’d gone to. But I suppose that by then getting hold of me was more important than anything else.’

‘And you thought you were going to keep out of my clutches for ever?’

‘I did. I couldn’t see why not. After all, you couldn’t spend your whole life here chasing me. And I could spend mine here because that’s just what I intended to do. I thought that was the answer. I thought it was my duty to opt out of your world of black and white.’

‘And now you see that it couldn’t be?’

‘No.’

From the dying embers a bright spurt of flame. And the answering shower of cold water.

‘You can’t see any alternative, though, can you?’

A moment of silence. A moment of chill realization.

‘I can’t see any alternative, but ...’

‘But you hoped. Of course you did. Pipe dreams are very pleasant. It would be nice if the world was made of pink sugar. But you know that it isn’t, don’t you?’

‘Yes.’

One word.

‘You know that there are unpleasant things in this world, do you not?’

‘Boils?’

The whispered admission.

‘Yes, it didn’t take long to hit on those. You suffered with them as a child?’

‘No.’

A note of wonder. The machine has made a mistake.

‘No, of course you didn’t.’

The calm knowledge.

‘Tell me about them.’

‘It was my mother. She had them all the time. She couldn’t get rid of them. It was in the days before antibiotics, you know. She died from them.’

‘And you’ve had them yourself? Or not yet?’

‘Not yet.’

The bowed head.

‘But even if you’ve escaped them so far, even if you think they could be treated nowadays, when the bombs come you will get them at last. And there won’t be any treatment.’

Roger looked round the room. The impersonal white walls, the black and white carpet, the heavy black curtains over the single window, the harsh central light.

‘You realize that as things are at present the bombs will come, don’t you?’

No answer.

‘Don’t you?’

‘But why?’

‘Because the world isn’t made of pink sugar. You’ve admitted that, haven’t you?’

‘Yes, but all the same ...’

‘But all the same. But all the same. All the same you would like it to be, isn’t that it?’

Silence.

‘Isn’t that what you mean?’

The bent head.

‘Answer me. You have answered me in your mind. Haven’t you?’

‘Yes. Oh, yes, I have.’

‘Then answer me to my face. You know the world is not all innocence and light, don’t you?’

‘Yes.’

‘And that any feelings you have that it might be better than it seems, or that it might be made better, are simply pipe dreams, rosy pipe dreams?’

‘Pipe dreams. Yes.’

‘So that our only hope lies in being stronger than our enemies?’

‘I don’t know.’

‘Yes, you do. There is no hope in opting out, is there? You’ve agreed to that.’

‘I suppose I have.’

'So the only way is to fight?'

'All right.'

'With whatever best weapon comes to hand?'

'Oh yes, it follows. It all follows.'

'Yes, it follows. It follows that if we need to use your skill with words we must do so. Doesn't it?'

'But perhaps that isn't very important.'

'Don't try to dodge. You've admitted it to yourself. You must have done. Otherwise you wouldn't try to produce futile arguments of that sort. It is not for you to judge whether your work is important. Words are part of our weapon. Have we or have we not the right to use them as we think fit?'

'Yes, you have the right.'

'And you are the person who can use them for us. Perhaps the only one. Isn't that so?'

'Yes.'

'So you will come back to Leeds. Yes or no?'

A short silence. The final silence.

'I'll come back.'

Chapter Twenty

'And we'll be delighted to have you back, my dear chap,' said the Bosun.

He looked at his watch.

'But there's no time to waste,' he said. 'The plane for Manchester leaves Collinstown in a couple of hours. Get on to Aer Lingus straight away and book us a couple of seats. They're open twenty-four hours a day.'

He went quickly across to a small table under the window, picked up a telephone on a long lead, brought it across to Roger and put it on the wide arm of his chair.

'The number's 42921,' he said.

Roger turned to the phone. The mechanical simplicity of the arrangements.

The Bosun went over and swirled back the thick black curtains. The pallid light of winter dawn. A tracery of thin bare branches.

Roger put down the telephone, leant back and looked up at the Bosun.

'All okay,' he said. 'No trouble at all.'

A warm rush of feeling that everything was going to be all right. The last niggling unease melting.

The Bosun grinned cheerfully down at him. He tousled the scanty golden hair above his rubicund forehead.

'Well,' he said, 'you certainly led us a hell of a dance.'

Roger laughed.

'Did I?' he said. 'It was most unlike me if I did.'

The Bosun flopped down on the edge of the other armchair and chortled with laughter.

‘You were most unlike yourself,’ he said. ‘Oh, my dear old fellow, when I think of my quiet little linguistics lecturer escaping from a 120-mile-an-hour Jaguar, inducing a great hulking thug from the docks to half murder a very chancy character from the Curragh, and heaven knows what else, I really can hardly believe it.’

Roger leant back in his chair.

‘I suppose it was me,’ he said, ‘though in a way I feel it wasn’t. It’ll be nice to think that somewhere deep down inside I’ve got the potentialities to do all that.’

‘Oh, it was you all right,’ the Bosun said. ‘You’ll see for yourself in a moment: Collins still bears a few marks left by that desperate chap from the docks.’

He bounced across to the door and opened it.

‘Collins, Collins,’ he called.

There was a distant answering shout.

The Bosun closed the door and came back to Roger.

‘I feel I ought to have a discreet bellpush to summon assistance,’ he said. ‘But perhaps that would only belong to the rather melodramatic persona I’ve had to adopt over this escapade. In any case, I think a yell is the only thing Collins reacts to.’

‘He gave the impression of knowing how to drive a car pretty well,’ Roger said.

The Bosun laughed.

‘Oh yes. That’s his thing. I tell you I’ve had to mix with some quite extraordinary people over here. Collins was a stable lad who not only doped every horse in sight – for which he might have been forgiven – but also rode like a brute, which of course was unforgivable. It was only when he got into something as insensitive as a motor car that he found his true vocation.’

The door jerked open.

Collins's shiny bullet head thrust in. Not really very much the worse for wear.

A grunt of inquiry.

The Bosun shook his great head in mock despair.

'Collins,' he said, 'get Mr Farrar's clothes. We can't have him sitting about looking like that.'

Roger glanced down at his bare feet.

'And, Collins,' the Bosun went on, 'tell Macmanaway we shall want some breakfast right away. Emphasize that he is to confine himself to his English repertoire.'

The door banged to.

'Thank goodness Macmanaway's, a cut above his companion in crime,' the Bosun said. 'At least he looks desperately respectable. Though as a matter of fact he's spent about half his life in gaol and the other half indulging in every form of petty -'

He broke off and put a finger to his lips as the door was unceremoniously opened again by Collins. He was carrying the clothes Roger had been wearing when he was captured. He dropped them in a heap on the floor and turned to go.

'Collins,' the Bosun said, 'do you think you could get us a bottle of champagne from somewhere if you took the car?'

'Sure I could.'

'Splendid. Another crime I expect, but I really feel we ought to celebrate a bit.'

Collins could be heard to grunt under his breath.

He went out.

The bang of the door.

The Bosun flopped down into his chair and stretched his arms high above his head.

'I'm exhausted,' he said. 'Heaven knows what you must be feeling like. Still, a drink and a good breakfast should set

us both up. There's a basin in the loo next door if you want a wash. First on the right.'

Roger looked at the chubby form snuggling into the low armchair. A look of inquiry.

The Bosun grinned.

'Oh, my dear chap,' he said, 'I know what you're thinking. After all my trouble in getting hold of you, aren't I taking a risk that you'll run off if I let you out of my sight? Well, I'm not, am I? You don't intend to revert to the gangster world, do you?'

'Heavens, no,' Roger said.

The Bosun laughed.

'Neither do I,' he said, 'or not until after breakfast anyway.'

Roger picked up the heap of clothes and went out smiling cheerfully. At the foot of a short flight of stairs there was the long corridor he remembered as if from a nightmare. What he had not noticed before was that there were several doors leading off one side of it. He tried the first and found himself in a small lavatory. In it there was a basin as the Bosun had said. Roger turned on the tap marked 'Hot'.

Cold water.

He tried the cold tap. Hot water.

He giggled with laughter. Things were all right really: it was only that appearances were sometimes deceptive.

He washed himself as well as he could, finding great difficulty in reaching down to his feet without falling over. Then he put on his clothes. It took him an extraordinarily long time.

The clothes seemed very baggy.

He went back to the room where the Bosun was still sitting in his low armchair.

'That's better,' the Bosun said.

He looked Roger slowly up and down.

‘You’ve certainly lost a bit of weight,’ he said. ‘I told you the other day you were getting too fat.’

Twinkling eyes over the rotund cheeks.

‘I suppose it’s a good thing,’ Roger said.

The pleasure of easy acquiescence.

‘Oh, it’s an excellent thing,’ said the Bosun. ‘Nobody should be allowed to get fat, you know. There should be a law against it – with the severest penalties.’

He patted his roundly protuberant stomach cheerfully. Abruptly he burst into a peal of laughter. Irrepressible, contagious.

Roger found himself smiling, tittering, giggling again. The Bosun wiped tears from his dumpling cheeks.

‘I’m sorry, my dear chap,’ he said, ‘but I suddenly thought of the whole spectacle of one immensely fat professor chasing one decidedly tubby lecturer puffing and panting up and down the streets of Dublin. It was altogether too much.’

He laughed once more. Wheezing, spluttering.

Roger laughed.

The door behind him was flung open. Collins and the respectable Macmanaway came in carrying between them a small polished wood table. They set it down and Collins dropped on to it a white tablecloth which he had been carrying tucked under one arm. He went out leaving the door swinging. Macmanaway assiduously smoothed the cloth.

He avoided looking at Roger.

Collins returned with a tray of cutlery and plates which he dumped on the table with a jarring bang. When Macmanaway had quietly arranged them he turned to the Bosun.

‘Breakfast is ready now, sir, if you wish it,’ he said.

He spoke with a consciously English English accent.

‘We’re starving,’ the Bosun said. ‘Bring it in, bring it in.’

Macmanaway left. The discreetly closed door.

The Bosun tiptoed over to Roger.

‘He did four years for bigamy and asked for twenty-seven breaking and entering offences to be taken into consideration,’ he whispered.

He began to giggle again.

‘And he’s so delightfully upright,’ he said. ‘I wish I could have seen him tearing after you across St Stephen’s Green. He nearly caught you too. It was an outrageous piece of luck for you bumping into your friend Courtney Myles like that and getting him to whisk you into his club.’

Roger grinned.

‘It was luck that he was there,’ he said, ‘but I deserve full credit for getting into the club with him.’

The Bosun laughed.

‘You do,’ he said. ‘My dear chap, you were devilishly resourceful.’

‘Especially as at that time I had grave doubts about the colonel,’ Roger said.

‘Doubts? Oh, of course, yes, you must have thought he might be my Infiltrator – what a lovely word.’

‘I did. After all, it looked very likely on the surface. He had been in the employ of the War Office all his life, and he had only just come to Dublin. It might –’

‘I must say,’ the Bosun broke in, ‘I admired the thoroughness with which you went out to Brownstown to check up on him. No, to check him. I’ll have to remember your passionate dislike of unnecessary participles.’

Roger smiled.

‘You never used to,’ he said affectionately. ‘But did you know that the colonel had been over to Yorkshire since he

returned to Ireland?’

‘No, good heavens. That was luck to me. What did he go for?’

‘To visit Marston Moor, which must be quite near Leeds.’

The Bosun laughed.

‘My dear fellow, Marston Moor’s all of twenty miles from Leeds. Myles wouldn’t have gone anywhere near Leeds. He almost certainly stayed in York, which is quite near, or even in one of those Harrogate hotels with central heating and palms in pots.’

Teasing affection.

‘So all my grand debate with the colonel on how far duty will carry you was purely academic,’ Roger said.

‘You gravely discussed all that? Was that in the club?’

‘Yes.’

‘And I was freezing to death in the appalling car waiting outside.’

The Bosun was still laughing when there came a well-tempered knock at the door.

‘Come in, come in,’ he called.

Macmanaway entered with a tray bearing a large entrée dish with a silver cover on it. He placed it gently on the table and fetched two chairs from the corners of the room.

The door shot open and Collins marched in, swinging a bottle of champagne in one hand.

The Bosun’s plump hands extended in a gesture of dismay. Collins looking through him.

‘Will that be all, sir?’ asked Macmanaway.

‘Yes, yes. We’ll look after ourselves.’

Macmanaway waited for Collins to go out. The door quietly swishing closed.

The Bosun looked at the table and clapped his hands together in delight.

‘Come on,’ he said, ‘let’s sit down. I’m longing for a drink.’

They sat opposite each other. The appetizing smell of fried bacon. The gentle warmth of the room.

The Bosun caught hold of the champagne bottle and began tugging at the wire with plump inexperienced fingers.

‘There’ll be the most confounded bang when I get this off after the way Collins was swinging the bottle about,’ he said.

Delighted expectation.

Roger sat back in the upright chair and looked at him.

The sudden frown of concentration as the twisted wire began to surrender. Child-like lack of the correct blasé attitude.

The cork shot off. The Bosun hopped back. Champagne frothed out on to the white carpet.

Giggling uncontrollably, the Bosun waded across to the table and poured some of the spuming wine into two flat glasses. Almost as much spilt on to the tablecloth.

He put down the bottle and picked up his glass.

‘Come on,’ he said, ‘a toast.’

Roger took his glass. He could feel the faint pricking of the bursting bubbles on his face as he held the glass waiting for the Bosun to speak.

‘I give you Ireland,’ the Bosun said.

An exuberant shout.

‘Ireland, Eire, John Bull’s Other Island, the Dark Rosaleen, an Poblacht, Erin, Eriu, the Twenty-six Counties and the Thirty-two.’

‘Goodbye Ireland,’ said Roger.

He drank.

His empty glass. The fizziness suddenly coming up into his nose.

His eyes watered and he flushed a beetroot red.

The Bosun flopped into his chair, pointed at him in glee and broke into a high peal of laughter.

He stopped himself at last, thumping the table with a rosy pink fist.

‘I – I must tell you,’ he said.

He swallowed down the last of the giggles.

‘I must tell you before I forget about a rather naughty thing I did. You won’t hear about it if you’re not going back to An Scoil or whatever it is. But when I was poking around there in my deplorably amateurish way I came across that perfectly dreadful secretary woman, Miss Dragon or Miss Hogan or something. Well, I even got to the point of following her about at one stage to see if she was corruptible or anything, and I saw her post one of those unmistakable football coupon things. You know, in the stripey envelopes. So do you know what I did? I posted her a cheque for five thousand pounds winnings.’

‘So that was it.’

‘I worked it all out, you see. She’s just the sort of person who goes in for the pools without really ever thinking she’ll win. When she got her cheque I bet she was furious. And then she would have been well used to the idea before she discovered it was a fake.’

He dived at the entrée dish and whipped off the cover. The dish was full of succulent pinky bacon, bursting brown sausages, deep bloody red kidneys and floppy fried eggs. The Bosun seized a spoon, dolloped them out high piled helpings, and then began shovelling up great forkfuls into his mouth.

‘I was a bit surprised you left it so long to do anything about that chap Fergus Peck,’ he said.

The words mixed up with a slobbering piece of egg.

‘It was just that Professor O Nuallain forgot to mention him,’ Roger said.

He put down his glass suddenly.

Perhaps after the long spell of bad food the richness of his present meal was upsetting him.

‘I’ve got something to tell you about O Nuallain,’ the Bosun said. ‘But first I must let you hear about my interview with friend Fergus. In some ways it was the funniest thing of the lot.’

Roger tried a piece of bacon. It was superbly cooked, tender and grease-free.

‘I tried to corrupt Fergus, of course,’ the Bosun said. ‘I didn’t know much about him really, and there didn’t seem to be anything to blackmail him about so I was reduced to offering him money. And it so embarrassed him. I have never in my life seen anyone so embarrassed. But, and this is the point, he was embarrassed for me. For me. He was filled with the deepest feelings of shame because a member of the British academic class could bring himself to stoop so low. He actually wriggled, you know, wriggled.’

‘That explains it.’

‘Explains what?’

‘Why he behaved so suspiciously when I mentioned your name to him in O’Brien’s Bar. That was what kept me hanging on to him when I knew you were coming at any moment.’

The Bosun held on to his champagne glass with both hands.

‘Oh but lovely,’ he said, ‘lovely. That’s the final touch. I think that makes it beat the Boycott affair.’

‘The Boycott affair?’

‘Oh yes, I forgot you didn’t know about that. There’s so much to tell you. We’ll talk about it all for years to come. But I’ll give you the bones of it now. You see, I tried to bribe old Austin Boycott too. I tell you I was ruthless, utterly

ruthless. I'd have bribed that appalling bore Wyndham if he'd been bribable. You know Wyndham?'

'Yes. I suspected him of course. Why do you say he isn't bribable?'

'Oh, think, my dear chap, think. All this champagne must be watering down your brains.'

The bottle tipped, the bubbling liquid streaming out.

'He's much too wrapped up in himself to want the things money can buy,' the Bosun said. 'But I was in the middle of the Boycott saga. Do you know he used to teach at my prep school? We called him the Drum: you know, he made a deep booming noise and was hollow inside. I take full credit for the joke: it showed my early promise. Well, generally I avoid him like the plague, but I decided in the interests of the grand design that I would have to make use of him.'

He leant forward and energetically scraped up the last of the bacon and eggs. He divided them with punctilious fairness between their two plates.

'So I approached him, and told him there was a lot of money in it. He seemed to be co-operating at first. He actually got himself in at your place - which I made a sort of preliminary condition. So I sent him some money. And do you know what the old apostle of honesty in personal relationships did?'

'I'll buy it.'

'He cashed the order and wrote me a letter telling me to go to hell.'

The Bosun tipped back his chair and regarded his empty plate and Boycott's behaviour with equal regretful satisfaction.

'And Etain?' said Roger. 'Did she succumb to bribery?'

The Bosun tipped his chair forward. The shock to the fragile legs.

‘My dear boy, you were rather smitten, weren’t you? But you must forget all that. It was your own fault, you know.’

Earnest eyes shining with Pickwickian benevolence.

‘Your own fault. You never got out and about enough. Consequently the first pretty face that comes along and you’re bowled over. But you wait till we get back. I’ll put you on a strict rota of social activities. In no time at all you won’t know which way to choose. That’s an absolute promise.’

‘I’m looking forward to it,’ Roger said.

He leant forward and looked at the Bosun across the debris of their gargantuan breakfast.

‘I really am looking forward to it,’ he said, ‘all of it. What on earth possessed me to kick over the traces like that I can’t imagine.’

The Bosun shrugged.

‘Don’t worry about it, my dear boy. You were working a bit too hard or something. It was very natural. My fault in many ways I shouldn’t wonder. I mean, I’ve no doubt that if you were working too hard it was because I was spurring you on. The truth of the matter is that I’m a wee bit obsessed with it all.’

He clasped the edge of the table and leant towards Roger. The light shining in his eyes.

‘Think of it,’ he said, ‘just think of it. A little more work, just a tiny bit, and we’re there. Ready with a complete technique for brainwashing a whole nation – in one intense campaign to be able to wipe out from a whole people all the false ideas that they’ve been brought up on from birth, bred on. It’s the unique solution. If no one can disagree with us, no one can fight us. It’s the Pax Britannica, and it’s only just round the corner. You should see what we’ve done in the last three years. Can you blame me for wanting you back when a man of your capabilities could really speed up the final burst?’

'I certainly don't blame you,' Roger said. 'I really must have been hallucinated all the time.'

He stood up.

'Let me say it just once now I'm seeing things in black and white again. Thank you. Thank you for pulling me out of it. You ought to have finished me off like Eric, you know.'

The Bosun heaved himself to his feet.

'All right,' he said, 'you've spoken your piece. Now don't let's hear any more about it. It had to be that way over Eric, though I can't pretend I liked doing it. But now you're back and the end is in sight, and things are going to go like one o'clock for ever and ever.'

'For ever and for ever.'

'But let's get a move on. I'd be furious if we missed that plane. There's only one a day for Manchester, and I can't wait.'

Roger yawned.

'I'll do my best,' he said, 'but I don't feel much like hurrying. I'm so sleepy.'

The Bosun smiled.

'I'll let you sleep on the aeroplane,' he said. 'I promise I shan't utter a word.'

'I'm sorry,' Roger said.

He grinned sheepishly.

'I really am worn out,' he said. 'But all the same I feel better. Better than I've felt for a long, long time.'

Another yawn.

He staggered after the Bosun towards the door.

A sleepy haze.

Dimly he remembered a loose thread.

'Oh, I know,' he said, 'what was it you were going to tell me about O Nuallain?'

The Bosun opened the door and set off ahead of him through the house.

‘Oh, he died. Yesterday morning, as a matter of fact. I heard it on the wireless. We’ll buy an *Irish Times* at the airport and see what sort of an obit they give him.’

He toddled comfortably along ahead of Roger. In the small barely furnished entrance hall he fumbled with the bolts on the front door.

Unconscious of his mistake.

Chapter Twenty-One

For a long moment Roger stood stock still. Paralysed by the clash of forces inside his brain. He had not an atom of strength left for any other activity. He stood frozen at the very point at which the Bosun had so off-handedly announced the death of Professor O Nuallain. He even ceased for those tumultuous half-seconds to breathe. The blood almost halted in his veins.

And the old order rose up from its grave to win. The Bosun's work had been too hurriedly done. Its effect was, after all, not as permanent as it had appeared to be. Perhaps the sole fact capable of reactivating Roger's dying beliefs had been casually put in his way. The death of the man who had symbolized for him all that was good in the new way of life he had hacked out for himself had ripped the distorting veils away. Once again he saw things as he had taught himself to see them.

The death of the hero had given birth to the unquenchable legend.

As suddenly as the vital forces in Roger had been suspended for the moment of battle they sprang back with renewed strength after the victory.

He moved forward again in the Bosun's wake. Easily, calmly. In full possession of his faculties. At a peak.

'I wonder if the *Irish Times* will do the old boy full justice,' he said.

The right note of faint denigration. Unfailingly hit on.

The Bosun giggled a little. A rippling in the balloon bulk.

'No,' he said, 'we'll have to wait till we get back home to see what he rates in the real *Times*.'

With puffy pink hands he tugged open the front door and pit-patted out of the house. His obscene waddle.

Roger followed him.

He found himself under a grey sky in a short driveway that might have belonged to any outer suburban house in any biggish town in England or Ireland. Only the sight of a green pillar box on the far side of the tidy road reassured him that he was still on the right side of the Irish Sea.

The house lay ten or twelve yards back from the road. A low wall and a privet hedge separated the garden from the broad pavement. Most of the space between the wall and the house was occupied by the drive on which stood the Bosun's familiar black overblown American car.

Underneath the privet hedge there was a border filled with the dry stalks of dead clumps of Michaelmas daisies with here and there a tiny light green shoot of some bulb thrusting up through them. Beside the chestnut paling fences that divided the house from its neighbours on either side were two narrower flower beds planted with chrysanthemums. One or two blooms that had defied the winter made pale splodges of faded colour.

Roger turned round and looked at the house itself. Two stories of quiet coloured brick with bow windows neatly paned in leaded diamonds on either side of the front door. The roof was of subdued green pantiles. The woodwork and drainpipes were painted in a discreetly gay shade of blue. At each corner of the roofline there was a large white ornamental vase.

Not a prison-like place.

The Bosun went over to the car, which was parked facing the curly ironwork gates neatly fastened back on their hooks. He opened the boot and glanced in.

'I was afraid they had forgotten to pack my stuff,' he said. 'We really ought to be on our way. To tell you the truth, I

can't wait till I'm out of this country. There's a desperate ramshackleness about it that depresses me.'

He looked at the watch swamped in the puffy flesh of his wrist.

'Where the hell is Collins?' he said. 'He should have been out here waiting for us.'

He turned and looked at the prosaic façade of the house. Spleen.

'Get in, my dear chap,' he said to Roger. 'I'm going to rout out Collins if it's the last thing I do.'

He strode angrily round the car, jerked open the front door on the passenger's side and held it open.

Roger went round the car the other way. He paused for one instant while he was out of sight of the Bosun.

A moment to take control of his pounding heart.

At the door of the car he stopped and stretched his arms wide before starting to get in.

He looked up at the Bosun's balloon face.

He glanced at the open road sweeping away round the corner. He raised an eyebrow.

The Bosun gave a short pig grunt of laughter.

'My dear chap,' he said, 'why shouldn't I leave you here on your own? After all, it's obvious my little course of treatment has been a complete success.'

The insufferable, high piping voice.

Roger settled himself on the wide bench seat of the car. The Bosun leant in before shutting the door.

'Of course,' he said, 'the treatment was very much a field version of the proper thing, but it was basically quite standard. First, a disorientation spell. Darkness, irregular meals, characterless food, all that sort of thing. Then when the time is ripe: the interrogation. A preliminary bout of unresponsiveness by the interrogator producing inevitably

doubts by the subject about his own identity. I rather liked you when you were three parts convinced you were a defence expert.'

Roger laughed.

'Next,' the Bosun went on, 'you start putting a few thoughts into the subject's head, just to add to the confusion. And then you go the rounds with some carefully chosen questions designed to hit on any likely weak places in the subject. Of course, I was extremely lucky to get on to the subject of boils so soon in your case. Still, I deserved some luck.'

Roger looked up at him.

'Oh yes,' he said, 'we each had our bits of luck in our marathon duel.'

The Bosun giggled.

'Did you like the way I handled the next bit?' he said. 'The harnessing of the nail filing noise? You see, you latch it on to the disliked questions, you set up a conditioned reflex, and then you match it to the entirely irrelevant question. Nine times out of ten it brings on the abreaction, the emotional crisis. And, of course, after that you get that interminable drivelling out of hopes and fears, and you wait till you judge the moment is ripe and then gently push the subject into that declaration in direct opposition to the previously held views.'

Roger forced the tensed muscles of his feet to relax.

'Now,' said the Bosun, 'this is where you have to act quickly. I've known beautifully caught fish wriggle off the hook just here because the interrogator wasn't quite quick enough. You've simply got to leap in and get the declaration turned from words into an act, some action performed once and impossible ever to expunge.'

Roger looked at the house door. If Collins came out now ...

The Bosun straightened up and declaimed into the cold suburban air.

'The Moving Finger writes; and having writ
Moves on: nor all thy Piety nor Wit
Shall lure it back to cancel half a Line.'

He bobbed down again.

'In your case booking the aircraft tickets,' he said.

'Of course.'

'And then I revert to my familiar role of father figure to put the experience in perspective for you as it were. And you get comfort and good food and all the rest of it.'

He straightened up again. The heaving balloon shape.

He gave a little grin. His tiny slit mouth curling.

'And now,' he said, 'as the wretched Collins has still failed to appear I shall have to leave you.'

He grinned ferociously.

'I'll see you in a couple of minutes.'

The pointed words.

He carefully closed the door on Roger and went back to the house.

The huge puffed-up body moving evenly forward with padding, noiseless steps.

He took out his keys and opened the front door. Roger turned his head to watch.

Lazily, unconcernedly.

The Bosun went into the house. The discreetly gay blue door began slowly swinging to.

A simple question of mechanics. Merely a matter of weight and the friction effect of the hinges. The factor of the age of the Yale lock to be taken into consideration, and whether at any time in the past it had been oiled.

If all the circumstances were right the door would click shut. If not, it would remain tantalizingly open. The Bosun from where he would stand in the hall shouting for Collins, who responded only to a shout, would have Roger under complete observation. Within range.

The door swinging slowly towards the jamb. Nearer, nearer.

The Bosun's inflated figure was cut off from sight. Roger began sliding along the bench seat into the driver's place.

He kept his eyes on the front door. Nearer, nearer.

At last it clicked to.

In the still air the sound of the latch was distinctly audible in the car.

Roger softly turned the ignition key, slipped off the handbrake and pulled back the choke. He paused a second and then tugged sharply at the starter. The engine broke into life. He jammed his foot hard down on the clutch pedal, wrestled for an instant with the gear lever, eased back the clutch and gave the engine a touch of acceleration.

Would he stall the unfamiliar vehicle?

He risked a flicked glance at the gay blue front door. Still closed.

The car was moving forward now. Slowly, lumberingly and quietly.

Roger negotiated the curly ironwork gates. The wide suburban road was free of traffic in either direction. He swung the big car into it. The engine seemed to be running entirely smoothly.

He put his foot harder on the accelerator.

The car shot forward obediently.

One quick look back. The discreetly gay blue door open. The Bosun standing there. A glimpse of a gun in his hand. But the corner cut him off.

He was safe.

Roger woke up next morning to find thin sunshine with a hint of spring in it dappling the buff wallpaper opposite the bed. He lay quietly letting the pattern of events form piece by piece in his mind.

This was a hotel in Cork. He had forgotten its name if he had ever noticed it. The bed was not very comfortable. He had driven all the day before, sending the bulbous American car smoothly along almost any road that presented itself before him. By the time he reached Cork in the evening its shiny black paintwork was covered in a veil of fine dust.

The bars of pale sunlight moving slowly across the buff anonymity of the wallpaper.

Roger fell into a doze. His mind wandering here and there, picking up a piece of information, toying with it and letting it drop.

And suddenly he realized what he had been thinking. He sat bolt upright in the hard bed. Two minutes concentrated endeavour to make sure that he had not been imagining things. Then out of bed, quickly into his clothes and downstairs.

He looked about. On the left a pair of frosted glass doors with the words 'Residents' Lounge' painted on them. He went quickly in. A writing table. A rack in stained oak. Hotel notepaper. He took a sheet, sat down and began to write.

My dear Bosun,

I am afraid you will have to go back to Leeds and forget about my existence. You see, I know now who the Infiltrator really was. You must have been delighted when I got it into my head that it was the girl I am in love with.

Oddly enough I have known the real answer almost all along. Only a curious circumstance, which will doubtless appeal to the psychologist in you, prevented me from realizing that I had the key to the whole business in my hand from the start. I experienced a classical Freudian blockage of memory over it.

As you will know, the very word 'Leeds' was bound to be one that my mind would reject. My whole experience there was something of which I was profoundly ashamed. And it was this word which was the clue to the whole thing. No one in Ireland except the Infiltrator knew I had ever worked at Leeds, so that if someone mentioned it to me they were bound to be the person I was looking for. But when they did say it I was unable to realize that they had.

Obviously what now allows me to remember hearing the word was the terrific mental upheaval which you were kind enough to put me through. It completely exorcised the blockage of memory over Leeds. So it was no surprise to find, when I woke up a few minutes ago, that - to use a phrase which I think comes from the great William James - the key word had 'strolled back into my consciousness'.

It was said to me in the library at the School. I can quote the exact context and I bet a tape recorder, if one had been preserving that very trivial conversation, would prove me right. This is the very phrase: 'I wouldn't have thought someone who's worked at Leeds would find a historical subject all that interesting.' It was spoken, of course, by that profound bore George Wyndham. He promptly followed it up by offering to take over my present philological work. I suppose the great rage that came over me then was really caused by my mind refusing to deal with the word 'Leeds'. Anyhow I forgot his remark entirely - until this morning.

In the light of it I now see, too, that it was Wyndham who tipped you off that I was at that absurd meeting of Austin Boycott's. Wyndham was a member of the audience, but at the time that did not surprise me: it was just the sort of occasion he would turn up at, just as he turned up at your presentation and gave you a willing tool at the very moment you found you needed one.

No, of course you did not need to bribe him. All he wanted was the feeling that he was moving in inner places. He improved quite a bit under your tuition, too. The way he created a huff for himself at Boycott's meeting so that he could get out to telephone you was decidedly astute. I hope you will continue to find him a useful colleague.

Because you are going to have him as a colleague for a long time to come, unless of course you prefer to turn him over to the police. That is going to be your punishment: to have that monumental bore with you at Leeds as long as you are there to give him a job. Otherwise I shall blow the gaff.

Yours permanently,

Roger Farrar.

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